



勇者

呪術師は

になれない

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A thaumaturge  
can't be a brave.

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レッドライジング  
ボックス



# Jujutsushi Wa Yuusha Ni Narenai

## Act 3: Drug

by Hishi Kage Dairi

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# Chapter 15: Martial Art

*Now that we're a team, lets get this dungeon over with!* is not what we did. Our location remains at the Fairy Square.

“For now, let’s get a grasp of what we’re capable of”

I’ve already heard about Futaba-san’s 3 novice Skills as one receiving the vocation of ‘Knight’, but I think it’s beneficial to do a practical test.

No matter how much power you receive, being able to use it when it counts is what really matters. And no, the class rep getting it done when suddenly facing the enemy right then and there isn’t normal. If I hadn’t practiced the canto for ‘Red Fever’ at least once, I could have fumbled it when finishing off the Armor Bear. In many things, practice does make perfect.

“Yes, I’ll be in your care!”

*Though I may be inexperienced*— in that manner, Futaba-san buoyantly lowers her head, seeming evermore amiable. I’m worried she could be deceived by some vile Shaman somewhere.<sup>[1]</sup>

“To start off, I want you to try out ‘Foresight’ and ‘Repel’, Futaba-san”<sup>[2]</sup>

Skills invoked by intention, otherwise said, Active Skills, are the usual category for defence moves like ‘Repel’. I have the feeling she hasn’t invoked it even once.

From what I’ve heard about Natsukawa-san using ‘Foresight’, it appears to automatically show effect, a Passive Skill. Well, I guess if you need to see the enemy’s attack for ‘Foresight’ to activate, it’s already in your sights then, obviously.

“Umm, so I should do what?”

“This time, I’ll pretend to attack you so I want you to foresee it”

“Pretend to attack... sounds kinda really scary!”

“Relax, I won’t be throwing Curses from the get go”

I mean, even if I did use 'Red Fever', I pretty much know what to expect. With her 'Blessed Body' being strong to injuries and ailments, she may not even feel the insignificant rise in temperature. Yeah, I kinda wanna try that out, but more importantly,

"I was wondering, is your belly alright? If it hasn't closed up, we can rest a bit longer"

"Oh, it's fine now. Doesn't hurt at all, Momokawa-kun's ointment worked super well"

"... Seriously? No way, is it fully healed?"

"Uh, seems so..."

Growing slightly doubtful at my look of disbelief, Futaba-san turns around on the spot. Then, quietly rolling up her the hem of her sailor uniform, she secretly makes sure.

"Yup, it really is healed"

"Eh, wait, let me have a look"

Her overtly affirmative answer. Healed, meaning no scarring, or even any scabs. Isn't that a bit too hard to believe?

"Kyaa!?"

As she was raising that lovely cry discordant with her build, I already had a box-seat view of Futaba-san's rich, white middle.

"Wow, it really is..."

It was a sight befitting my involuntary exclamation. The deep, horizontal gash right below her navel had closed up without a trace. I can't see a scratch; there remains but a slight tinge of unwashed blood, and a bit of dry scabbing on its way to peeling off.

What astounding recovery. Was my sloppily compounded Ointment A really that high efficiency?

Certainly, the ShamdelionsFalse Dandelion did seal the lacerations I got from the Armor Bear pretty fast, but the scabs haven't completely ripened even now.

Suppose that asshole Masaru kept punching me in the stomach and not the face, the wound would've opened right back up, and even now, if I push myself, there's a risk of hemorrhage.<sup>[3]</sup>

As an herb, there's no doubt the Shamdelion has extraordinary hemostasis effects. Mixing that with the White Blooms and Fairy Walnuts that have some healing properties I don't really understand, raised the effects by leaps and bounds— really sounds too good to be true.

Intuition Pharmacy determined that combining these 3 wouldn't cause any earth-shatteringly synergetic effect. It only guaranteed that the effects wouldn't cancel each other out.

Therefore, Futaba-san's wound completely healed implies—

“U, uu... M-Momokawa-kun, aren't you done?”

As though my intense scrutiny of her belly-button was much too embarrassing for her, Futaba-san's face was beet red. Her keeping the sailor uniform rolled up even as tears are on the verge of gathering displayed a worrisome purity. Definitely the type that's too nice for her own good.

“Ah, sorry, I'm done”

I wanted to immediately take advantage of that fact, and have a poke-fest on her waxen flab for at least 5 minutes, but I refrain for obvious reasons. Loosing her trust via sexual harassment would be the worst way to lose one's dignity.

Right, my experience with the opposite sex being nil further elects for a great need to be cautious. Girls are apparently hurt by things guys don't even consider trivial. A pain in the— ahem, very innocent is the word.

“I'm glad it's healed so quick. I think it may have something to do with ‘Blessed Body’.”

“Dressed Body?”

At least remember your own Skill name right. And no, you don't need to look it up on your phone.

“You're a Knight remember? They gave some fuzzy definition like its strong against illness and wounds, but I think it's become like medication will work a

lot better”

“I, uh, I guess?”

“It is. If it was plain super-healing powers, it would’ve gotten better even without my ointment”

Sure, if this Skill was that amazing, the wound would’ve already started closing when I found her. But in reality, she was almost dead from blood loss. Maybe it was too much for the ‘Blessed Body’s’ healing prowess, or rather, maybe it’s a low tier Skill that doesn’t make the natural regeneration corrections when damage is too high.

That being the case, if it stacks with healing agents, then having me, who can make tons of it only provided a Fairy Square, can save Futaba-san from a major portion of injuries. Well, it’s gonna heal but it’ll still hurt like hell.

“Then if you’re all patched up, let’s get back to business shall we?”

“Okay, umm... only pretend attacking right? Go easy on me, please?”

I mean, it’ll activate granted that there’s an attack so. You’re gonna have to dodge with ‘Foresight’ or defend with ‘Repel’.

“No prob. If it’s gonna hit, I’ll make sure to stop an inch~2.5cm away”

Stopping that close requires quite a bit of skill. I have not a smidge of confidence in precisely stopping my fist or a shinaipractice sword once at their fulcrum. I indeed don’t, but said that anyway. It’s fine, you can trust on the vocation.

“kay, so I need a branch or something... nice, let’s use this”

From a Fairy Walnut tree growing at a corner of the square, I locate a decent sized branch and reach for it. With a firm grim, I brace myself and pull—

“Kuh...”

Tough. It’s much more solid than I imagined. I thought I chose a one thin enough that even my slender arms could break, but it will not budge.

“HaAAAAA...c’mon!”

I was all up in a frenzy, but no use. Seems this Fairy Walnut tree, is quite

deceptively sturdy.

“Umm, Momokawa-kun, you alright?”

“Huff... hah... Nah, this thing’ll never br—”

Sounded Futaba-san as she casually grabbed it, gave it a pull, it snapping away as a result.

“I did it Momokawa-kun, I broke it see!”

“Ah, yea, you did, thanks”

I shudder a bit comparing my flimsy limb to Futaba-san’s bulky rod of an arm with a thickness akin to my thighs and realizing the utterly unsurmountable difference in strength. This brute strength must be in reason of her having the vocation, ‘Knight’... No, not really. Who am I kidding. I’m just weak as hell.

Reflecting anew on my frailty, I receive the aforementioned branch from Futaba-san

Now to get psyched, and start the experiment.

“Yah—!”

“Kyaa—”

Seeing my fledgling swordplay, Futaba-san’s eyes shut, body cowers, motion stills. If this was a monster, even I had a chance to score a critical hit, but now’s not the time for that.

“Futaba-san, I don’t think ‘Foresight’ will activate if you don’t atleast *look* at me attacking”

“A...yes, sorry... I didn’t see anything”

Gee, I wonder why. It could be that when you master ‘Foresight’, it stops relying on your eyes, and uses a 6<sup>th</sup> sense of sorts, but for the current Futaba-san at least, it isn’t anywhere near that level.

“Alright, again. Pay attention this time, alright”

“Uu... I’ll try...”

Futaba-san looks entirely weak in the knees, paying attention to the branch. I

may be stating the obvious, but we had 2 branches prepared: the 1<sup>st</sup> for me to attack with, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> for Futaba-san to invoke 'Repel' on. Goes without saying that collecting the 2<sup>nd</sup> one was a piece of cake using Futaba-san's superior muscle. Though it was a size thicker than mine, the 2<sup>nd</sup> one too broke off without a hitch. I felt like her might could easily break off not only branches, but a person's bones as well.

"Eiya—"

On take 2, I attempted to swing considerably slower. Though there is a doubt whether her 'Foresight' will recognize and react to something like this as an attack—

"Wa, wawah!?"

Futaba-san moved, and with surprising agility at that, and successfully dodged my lackadaisical attack. She strafed her body leftward, right beside which, my feeble slash sluggishly made its way.

"Did, you see it?"

"Yeah, I really saw it!"

It appears to match her story, 'Foresight' lets you perceive the path of the enemies attack with a faint white glow. If it could recognize that sham of a strike as an actual attack, it doesn't look to have very severe activation conditions.

"This time, I'll come with the same attack, so try repelling"

"O-okay, got it... I'll do it!"

Perhaps thanks to this small but sure victory, Futaba-san's face seems a bit more vibrant than just before. Alright, let's keep it up at this pace.

"Here I go— Ei"

As I made another of the same lighthearted attack following that utterance, an immense shock ran up both my arms.

"—yah!"

To my astonishment, while with that enthused cry reaching my eardrums, I



found myself dancing through the air.

The scenery rushing past, swirling violently as if there's a bug in the camera, was the sight that assailed my eyes. But somehow, I distinctly saw the branch I was supposed to be holding on to, also spin uncontrollably and fly away.

“—Fugyaaa!?”

Raising a heavy\_damage\_voice.mp3, I slammed into the ground. Pain. My whole body groans... But luckily, I landed on soft grass. It's, probably not too serious.

“M-Momokawa-kun!? Wh—!? Oh no, are you alright!?”

In scattered, hazy consciousness, I see Futaba-san cry out while charging towards me with her dump-truck-like frame. I felt a bit dead.

“I-I'm okay... I'll live...”

“Uah— I'm sorry! I'm really sorry Momokawa-kuun!”

While still lying pancaked to the ground, I reign in Futaba-san's madly desperate apologizing, by somehow moving an arm. Hmm, this angle, I can almost see under her skir—

“*Sigh...* it's just some scratches, so no worries. I was pretty surprised though”

I somehow or other raise my body while resisting the temptation of panties teasing my eyes. I'd pretend to be just fine but... nope, I'm actually fine. By some miracle, I hadn't sustained a single scratch. In Judo class, I was great in only my falling techniqueukemi after all.

“R-really sorry... I had no idea that would happen...”

“So you definitely used ‘Repel’ just now right?”

“...Yeah. I thought about trying it, and my hand somehow naturally...”

Scored a homerun on me I see.

“I'm truly sorry! I'll be much more careful next time, so—”

“No, you really don't have to apologize that much. In fact, it was a big success”

Certainly, Futaba Meiko has now, at this time, for the first time, invoked her Martial Art. It's now obvious that even a wuss like her can do it if she can only muster the will.

But what I'm most grateful for, is that force.

"So this is the power of the vocation, 'Knight'... Futaba-san, you'll definitely get stronger"

A strength that I can never hope to achieve is within her reach. I feel like I've finally found a ray of hope towards this dungeon capture.

"So let's go for it"

"Yea... Alright! I'll work my best, Momokawa-kun!"

[1]..*in your care...may be inexperienced*— these are the usual Japanese humbling greetings, like if someone said, "Great to have you on the team", you reply "Great to be here!", I could have TLed as that, but then the bowing doesn't make sense. Please excuse this small infraction of weebism.

[2]I don't know why it took me this long to realize... anyway Abandon → Foresight. Yeah, this matches the description much better. I'll fix up the previous chapters later.

[3]Fake-delion → Shamdelion, sounds slightly better.

# Chapter 16: Let's try Killing part.1

Having of course rested, resupplied in herbs, in addition to getting our equipment in order, we finally decided to tackle this thing called dungeon capture. That being said, it'd be hard to declare if we were truly in top condition.

“Having the knives stolen really stings...”

Every single piece of Futaba-san's knife set was robbed by Satou Aya. Not even single paring knife remains. Among edged items, we only possess my boxcutter, and a pair of scissors that Futaba-san had. As weapons, they convey not much reliability at all.

Still, no use in mulling over it. For now, we collected the toughest branch Futaba-san could break, and using the cutter, shaved off the tip into an impromptu spear. It's barely better than being empty handed, but it's enough to stab a Goma to death. Though I guess, one would be the limit.

“As for the meds, I got a good harvest, so that's atleast good”

Actually, the variety of flora of the Fairy Square we left just now was slightly different from that of the last one. We got our hands on a fair amount of this one berry that, when ingested, gives an increase in strength, or rather, a direct attack boost, for a temporary period. Obviously, it won't be at rates of 2x or 3x, it's something like a slight up from normal, just barely a powerup... Again, definitely better than nothing.

I'm calling it a 'Power Seed', and at a glance, it's really quite similar to the spreading yew. A tiny, red, bead-like outer layer with a black central pit. The trees fruiting such Power Seeds could be found blended in with the Fairy Walnut trees.<sup>[1]</sup>

According to Intuition Pharmacy, it's made so that when ingested, it utilizes a bit of Magic, and a fair amount of energy from the body, and converts it into strength. Eat too much, and it'll exhaust all energy from the body, and you'll collapse from malnutrition. Well, I guess that's a pretty typical kind of after-

effect from powerup-like items.

I've tested it out, and on my own body, looks like 10 at a time won't cause any trouble. And when it comes to a battle, I've predetermined to pop one just beforehand.

Though, if we got caught in an ambush, there'd be no way to make time for that.

With more caution than ever, I take steps forward within this stone passage that doesn't seem to change. The formation is, me at front, and Futaba-san behind.

There's a lot to say about a Shaman at the vanguard, but she was walking so agitated that we weren't moving at all.

"Ah, Futaba-san, stop"

A few dozen minutes after departure, we arrive at the first change.

"A-, Th-this is..."

Twisted, ominous trees engulfed in green leaves congregated en masse in this domed space.

"...So this is that Forested Dome"

It's where Futaba-san and the Class Rep encountered the troop of Goma. It's likely not that exact place, but since it's so similar, there's a big chance it's become a hunting ground where Goma operate.

Naturally, there's the chance of other Monsters also lurking. With our power right now, we can't even handle a swarm of Fang Rats. I'd like to get some battle experience, but we have to be very careful in choosing the enemy. Actually, is there a Monster we *can* beat?

"W-what to we do, Momokawa-kun?"

"I don't wanna go" Futaba-san's eyes complain. My clouded gaze doesn't hold any sympathy though...

"Looks like we can't progress without going through here. It's pretty much unavoidable"

I don't want to pass through this kind of dangerous area either, I'd refuse to every time given the chance. I really would, but the magic compass was pointing straight at the other end. I even made sure to check Futaba-san's one, but no use, both still pointed straight there without the slightest flinch.

"Running there full speed... sounds like a bad idea, we'll just have to walk along the walls"

If we go by Futaba-san's story, there's a chance that this Forested Dome is laid down with traps. When Natsukawa Minami came to save the Class Rep from the attacking Goma, she had used a pitfall.

Since it activated from an arrow hitting a tree branch, I'd imagine there was like a sensor like thing placed on some tree that detects shocks or tremors. Being a Thief, Natsukawa-san might have an idea about its odd and ends... but I have not a clue, and Futaba-san didn't hear much more about it either.

That means, I can't carelessly go around collecting poison mushrooms and herbs either. I think it's very likely we'll find something of that genre in this Forested Dome, but yeah, desperate times. I'll just think about quietly passing through.

"With our backs to the wall, we probably won't get done in from behind. Also, don't let your guard down a single bit. You could accidentally trigger a trap"

"Y-ye...yeah, got it"

Eyebrows knit full on in a 人 shape, Futaba-san had an almost about to cry face, but still prepared herself up and nodded to my words.

Well then, I'll get psyched too; let's cross this Forested Dome with everything we got.

"... We aren't getting there huh, it's surprisingly big"

Left hand side along the ashen walls, we proceed, sliding along. Our attention focused less forwards, and more towards deep into the dim forest spread wide at our right. Any time now, those filthy Goma might jump out from behind the thicket, the suspense is killing me.

"Futaba-san, alright?"



“N-no-, no problem—”

She replies with an agitated voice that doesn't seem alright at all. I haven't been checking on her behind me, but there's no chance of us getting separated.

Reason being, she has grabbed onto the hem of my gakuran uniform with all her might.

*You really think you can use your spear like that?* I thought to warn her, but seeing her hand paled and trembling, I decided not. Cause if there was someone in front of me, I'd want grab on to them too.

Truly birds of a feather. As a coward myself, I can't laugh at her cowardice—and just as I immersed in those self-deprecating thoughts.

“Stop, Futaba-san”

“-!? W-w-w-w-wha-w-what's wrong Momokawa-kun”

“Quiet”

I use my hand that was shaking in tension, to calm the intensely flustered Futaba-san, and concentrate on the moving shadow that abruptly caught my eye.

“...A Monster, there's a Monster”

Futaba-san swallows her breath. She gets full points just by not screaming right now.

Luckily, looks like the other side hasn't noticed us. For the time being, I hid myself behind a thick tree nearby, and decided to cautiously observe this Monster we found.

What I saw, was a lone dog. Dirty to the point of looking brown, it was a mid-sized canine with a red coat. It was quite thin, I could tell at a glance that it hadn't found any food in a while. Loosely dangling its vigourless tongue and tail, the dog was trudging along, wandering between the trees.

“T-that dog... I've seen one before”

“It's the dog Monster that blows sparks, right?”

In her story, Futaba-san talked about fighting packs of these Red Dogs. It

wasn't coming at them with a flamethrower-like powerful fire attack, but easily repelling them had a lot to do with the ability of those 3 members. Us right now can't even take on a pack of ordinary wild dogs. Exactly, not a pack.

"It looks pretty weak. I'm thinking, even we can take that down"

"Eh-!?"

Her eyes protruding in surprise, perhaps because she was scared of actually fighting, or maybe even feeling sorry for attacking a weak-looking pup. Half of both I'd wager.

"If you don't beat Monsters, you won't progress in your Vocation. If you can hunt that one dog, maybe, just maybe Futaba-san can attain an Attack Skill. You got this chance to beat an enemy risk free, don't throw it away"

Seems a bit late to be explaining, but I'm letting her hear it all the more. Futaba-san is scared as always, but she seriously gives her all, listening and adhering to my explanations. She isn't just a mess of feelings and tears, she's got her admirable side too.

"Don't worry, I'll do support with my Curses. There's only one, so we can definitely beat it"

"Y-yea... Got it, Momokawa-kun. I'll, do it"

So she's finally going for it; Futaba-san stiffened her brows and nodded to me with a brave expression.

"So first, you can let go of my clothes"

"A-, s-sorry..."

Looking embarrassed, she quickly withdraws her hand from the hem of my gakuran. She was grabbing super tight, so it's gotten wrinkled.

"Ok first, I'll stop it with my Curse. I think, I can seal the Red Dog's movement with that, so in that time, you go in and stab. I'll give the signal"

I pass by the faithfully nodding Futaba-san, and concentrate on the dog weakly walking by. It has already passed by us, I can see its butt, an orange colored, lowered tail, dangling pitifully there.

Any further, and it'll be out of range. I can only do it now.

“Entwine its escape, with weaving hair—”

The aria I recite is one attained after beating the Armor Bear, a new Curse. And this long-awaited new move is...

“—‘Blackhair Bind’!”<sup>[2]</sup>

From the tree's shadow, I aim my 4<sup>th</sup> Curse at the dog's butt, and it immediately shows effect. It appears quietly from the shadows near the dog's feet at it frailly continued its trail.

Deep black, thin fibers, yes, these were indeed hair. A handful, a bundle of these hairs softly rose from the shadows, twining onto the Red Dog's hind legs.

Sensing the change, the dog howls loud, pouncing and struggling with its large body, but the Blackhair's grasp showed no sign of tearing, or looseness.

Nice, looks like its got a bit of endurance. ‘Blackhair Bind’, true to its name, beautifully bound the enemy's escape.

“Plunge into permanent swelter, and curse the body— ‘Red Fever’”

And, though the effect is doubtful but just in case, aiming to weaken it even a bit more, I throw in my good old 1<sup>st</sup> Curse, ‘Red Fever’. As if surprised by the sudden light fever coursing through its body, the Red Dog lets out a miserable whine.

This is the maximum possible support from me.

“Now Futaba-san! Stab it from the back!”

“OK! Yaaah!”

With a high pitched cry, Futaba-san heavily charged with the unreliable spear in hand. I can't call her running *fast* even as a compliment, but Blackhair Bind won't be letting go of the Red Dog in the measly 10 meters~33feet she has to cross in getting there.

This Curse lasts a certain amount of time after activation; most likely, there's an amount of mana it's charged with and it's made to manifest until that mana is consumed. However, if I concentrate on that invocation continuously, I can

supply more mana, and use my power to control the binding strength.

As both its hind legs are bound, the Red Dog can't turn back and exercise its fangs or claws. If, following my instructions to the dot, she uses the spear's reach to thrust from the back, we can do a completely safe and one-sided attack.

With me setting the stage this well, even Futaba-san can deliver a killing blow.

"Huff... haa... I-I'll do it—"

Her breath short from dashing at full power for a short period, Futaba-san timorously raised the spear overhead. That's right, now you only have to strongly jab it in, you can kill the Red Dog. Yes, hand over to us weaklings, those precious experience points!

"...Haa, haa... haa..."

The spear, won't come down. Futaba-san's rough breathing echoes throughout the strangely silent Forested Dome.

"Futaba-san, what's up? 'Blackhair Bind' is still stopping it from moving, but you should really finish it off soon"

"A, Ah... Umm, Momokawa-kun..."

The spear stuck aloft, Futaba-san slowly turned and faced me. The moment I saw her face, I understood everything.

"I-I'm sorry... I can't..."

How many times has it been, seeing her crying face. The girl called Futaba Meiko, she's cowardly, a crybaby, her spirit as small as her body big, and I, I was supposed to somewhat recognize that during this short time I've known her. That's why, I should have expected this.

"I can't, do it... Sorry, sorry, Momokawa-kun... *Uuu...*"

That's right, she hadn't prepared herself to kill Monsters.

Killing a living thing, stealing a life, more than a matter of ethics, it was surely because he was a girl raised in peaceful Japan, it's only natural to feel that way. Japanese people can't easily kill such large animals.

I wonder at what point I fall in that category. Flies and cockroaches, I could do with no hesitation, in fact, I could swat at them with real eyes of murder... But at least, dogs and cats, I don't think I could. Even mice, if it came to killing one, I'd definitely waver.

I imagine the limit for a typical Japanese would be at clearly harmful bugs, and marine life procured as food. Especially in the killing of mammals, one would need willpower surpassing the ordinary. Those who could calmly do this would be ones who do it as a job, or ones whose mindset was aberrant. Right, killing animals, you'd need to be an aberration. It's not an action of someone bound by law and order.

Because you were thrown into another world, because you need to kill Monsters to escape, because you can't get stronger otherwise. Those reasons wouldn't suddenly enable us to easily take a life.

"I see... yeah, that's right... it's fine, Futaba-san"

Keeping control of 'Blackhair Bind', I walk to where Futaba-san is. She was crying, apologizing, saying "sorry" countless times. So regretfully, so anguishedly. But in that bitter face, I can't see her looking disgusted at herself for not being able to commit the act.

"It's fine, it's ok Futaba-san. Don't worry"

"*huu, uu...* B-but..."

"Really it's fine, just leave it to me"

Rather than forcing her right now, I'll just make things quick and finish up in her place. It's dangerous to be bumming around this place after all.

So I try to somehow calm the unsettled Futaba-san while holding my spear abreast, and send her behind me.

"*Sigh...*"

Having come to raising the weapon myself, I feel quite the resistance. I feel like I can't blame Futaba-san who said she couldn't do it. Given the chance, I wouldn't either. Less sorry, and more sick, is what I feel.

But for me right now, it's not something I can't do. Killing the Armor Bear was



nothing but a fluke, strong luck, but I can have confidence. No, I can have grudge. I aim this grudge towards all things called Monsters that seek my life.

*“Dei-!”*

From the swung down spear— I mean, it’s just a sharpened branch but still, I definitely felt a feedback.

A shrill cry from the dog, and a small one from Futaba-san beat into my ears.

The tip was pierced into the dog’s back, but shallow. The dirty red coat was being coated in inundant fresh blood, but it’s not enough.

*“—Ya!”*

So I stabbed many, many times that frail back. ‘Til its life kept residing in its body, neither did my hands stop. Stimulated by murderous impulse, I couldn’t stop myself at all.

*“Haa...huff... I-is it, dead...”*

At some point, the Red Dog had stopped leaking groans of pain, it lay there on the ground. I noticed that the ‘Blackhair Bind’ tangled around its legs was gone. I was so fixated on stabbing, maintaining the spell completely slipped my mind.

It’s bad. So much that I realized myself; I was quickly losing composure. The sound of my heartbeat was annoyingly loud, showing just how agitated I am.

*“M-Momokawa-kun...”*

*“Fuh... It’s over, it’s dead now... getting the Core, sounds like a lot of time, let’s not”*

I desperately calm my rough breathing, and turn back to the teary faced Futaba-san. I was intending to show myself composed after a job well done; but I wonder, right now, how do I reflect in those eyes.

Beside a dog sinking in blood, stands a boy with bloodshot eyes. He shows great promise in becoming a future aberrant. I just did what was necessary right now, but maybe this could drive her away.

*“Let’s not, stop here too long”*

Futaba-san was still dismally shedding tears, but nodded. That’s good, she still

hasn't given up on following me.

So, leaving behind the shredded, repeatedly stabbed corpse of a dog, we get out of the Forested Dome.

We hadn't collected a Core, or any new powers, but did gain an indescribable weariness, and exhaustion.

*"Sigh... It's hard... I don't feel good about the future"*

[2] Hey, new powers, it's Kurokami Shibari(黒髪縛り), tled quite literally as Blackhair Bind~

## Chapter 17: Let's try Killing part.2

After that, we saw packs of Fang Rats pass through the ends of the passages twice; in a woodland area, we saw a troop of Goma walk past while making a racket for some reason. After the skinny Red Dog, we advanced through the dungeon without a single other fight.

Thus precisely following the directions of the Magic Compass, we arrived at a stairway. Similar to the one where I first entered this dungeon, it was a spiralled descent. And as I thought maybe, there indeed was a Fairy Square upon reaching the bottom.

“Let's stop here for today. We should get a little sleep”

“Mm... ok, let's”

Me and Futaba-san, we were both tired. Even if I didn't make the proposal to rest, I'm certain we'd both be out like logs.

I'll just stop thinking too much for now. Controlling our exhaustion, Futaba-san and I ate a poor meal of Fairy Walnuts with cold water, and descended towards a siesta.

Sleeping with a girl under the same roof... would be a rom-com like scenario that I truly couldn't care less for, and I lied down freely spreading my arms and legs over the soft grass. Futaba-san too, right now she wouldn't be stupidly conscious of the opposite sex, and should be weary, yes, mentally weary, and going to sleep at an appropriate distance away.

“Uu.. ku, uuu...”

As I turn my face to peek, what appears is a side-turned large, round back trembling. She's doing her best to suppress it, but the crying is obvious.

For what cause, is she shedding tears this time? I had no desire to think about it, and per consequent, none to console her either. I want to cry too.

The surprising difficulty of killing Monsters. Futaba-san who can't attack. Packs of them where it's instant death at encounter. Every one of these is more

than enough to chip away at my spirit. None of them were at the level of stress a short, otakugeek highschooler could hope to endure.

“It’s ok, I’m, still, okay...”

Murmuring as if it was a prayer, I tightly shut my eyes.

“I still, don’t wanna die... like hell I’ll die here...”

Survival instinct. That’s what moves me, the only, yet absolute think that drives me. I’ll definitely get out of this place alive. And I’ll absolutely make it back to my previous world.

“...Nn-“

Sometime during my endless contemplations, I had fallen asleep. I don’t know for how long, and I don’t feel like checking.

Feeling the languish of awakening, rubbing at my eyes, I raise my body.

“Futaba-san’s... still sleeping”

They say that sleep brings up a child well, the thought buzzes through my mind. But having the body grow while the heart stays immature makes that completely useless. If you could become courageous just by dozing off, I’d be a Hero already. At the least, a level 58 one.<sup>[1]</sup>

“No, that’s wrong... it’s not, her fault...”

Seeing Futaba-san’s utter uselessness, unable to kill even a starving, and on top of that, restrained pup, my inner feeling for her becoming the same as those 3 who abandoned her, is something I can’t deny. I’ve been hitting my limits too, I just can’t let her off. I’m not that big of a man to laugh away these things as nothing, I know that for a fact. Just as I expected things from the strength of a Knight granted to Futaba-san, I was all the more disappointed and full of complaints at her failures like this.

Still, I won’t resent her. I won’t get angry, or blame her. Ever. I don’t give a shit about my feelings. If feelings aren’t working, try logic.

So think, think Momokawa Kotarou. Before finally speaking out that disgruntled resentment, think up a plan.

“...Ah right, first on the list of problems are those Novice Skills”

The biggest flaw isn't with the individual that is Futaba Meiko, but with the shitty system of this anything-goes magic-filled other world that produced the thing called a 'Vocation' which is a disappointment that keeps on giving.

I already have an endless list of complaints from being a Shaman with nil Attack Skills, but let's leave that aside for now. What's important are the 3 Novice Skills that Futaba-san currently possesses: 'Foresight', 'Repel', and 'Blessed Body'.

That she has no Attack Skills *i.e.* Martial Arts— is not the issue.

The issue would be her lack of Skills that focus the mind in battle, Psyche Skills.

Up 'til this very morning, well we may have changed by now, but anyway, we were just normal highschoolers. Just because we received magical powers, there's no way we can suddenly go fight fearsome Monsters.

Nevertheless, be it the Higuchi party I encountered, or the Class Rep team that abandoned Futaba-san, they were more or less able to fight off those Monsters.

As for why these students could conveniently go to battle. The secret lies in powers that affect their psyche.

Concentrate	Can draw the bow without faltering of mind
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If I recall, there was a name and description like that. Right, this was indeed one of Satou Aya's Novice Skills in archery.

She had neither the composed disposition of the Class Rep nor the bravado of Natsukawa-san. She was a model of *completely average highschool girl*, and though I hadn't spoken to her even once, her demeanor in class leads me to that judgement.

Even someone like her was standing shoulder to shoulder with the other two, fighting with gusto.

If you think about it, in front of a Goma or Red Dog, Satou-san is very likely to scream out in fear, or even turn stiff in shock, reactions leading straight to



death. For her contribution to the fight, there'd be scant different to Futaba-san.

Her betraying those expectations, properly carrying out long-distance offensives with her bow, was nothing *but* from that 'Concentrate', that magic power that allowed her to smoothly carry out battle.

What I think, is that this power not only offers concentration when firing an arrow, but also mitigates the resistance felt when that arrow hits an animal.

Perhaps it's that, after the battle, the guilt comes rushing in... Still, using this power, she'd be able to coolly fire the bow anytime new skirmishes started. The guilt x resistance from taking a life gone, there wouldn't be any shaking from fear and anxiety either. Ever calm of mind, akin to the masters of Japanese Archery.<sup>[2]</sup>

Do that for a while, and she'd get used to killing Monsters pretty soon. Humans can adapt. Right now, Satou-san may even be able to casually headshot Monsters like those FPS addicts.

Anyway, after first getting a hold of this Psyche Skill, even complete amateurs in battle can avoid the worst of pitfalls known as 'panic' to a 100%.

If Futaba-san had an ability to fearlessly face any foe, the mindset of a Knight, a 'Chivalrous Spirit' per say, then she could use those log-like arms to bash down on any Goma or Red Dog.

Yeah, if she was that awesome, she wouldn't have been abandoned by those 3 in the first place, and wouldn't have met me and become an ally either.

"Somehow, gotta get her a Psyche Skill..."

In the end, we're back at the premise of developing the Vocation through combat. The category of Skill we want did change, but the means to get it remains the same.

And, it's because that's not working out, that I'm going through all this trouble. Came right back in a circle, goddammit.

"Ok, next time, let's avoid the Red Dog, and get a Fang Rat, then... or maybe I can somehow trick her into killing..."

It a feeling where I'm simulating an RPG and trying to nurture a super weak character, expecting great things for later. Getting the enemies HP down to 1 and letting the weak character deliver the kill and get the exp.<sup>[3]</sup>

"As if that's gonna work dammit..."

To my regrets, this world is neither a game, nor follows does it follow the rules of any game system.

At the very least, if you fight honestly and gather experience, you can get new powers, is something established from what I've heard from Futaba-san. That's likely because, as per the info from the text messages, our Vocations are granted by gods related to battle.

That's why I acted under the assumption that even if we beat that weakened Red Dog, it'd turn into experience points... but really, I'm not all too sure exactly what level of fighting is considered enough to levelup the Vocation.

It could even be that learning conditions are completely dependant on the whims of the God... if that's the case, then the one who granted Futaba-san her Vocation, the God of Knights, it was apparently a woman's voice so maybe Goddess, anyway, this God of Female Knights may not recognize her beating monsters with underhanded methods.

What'll I do if she wants something like my super lucky Armor Bear slaying to grant a levelup... it's at impossible difficulty already, fuck.

"*Sigh*, let's just make some meds"

I decide to avoid all this dead end thinking, and immerse myself in work as if running away from reality.

That reminds me, I haven't closely looked at the details of this Fairy Square, maybe I can make a new discovery like that Power Seed from before.

With light expectations, I do an "easy does it" like those old folks and stand up.

<sup>[1]</sup>There could be a reference here, but I wouldn't know. if someone does, please say. I'll change this tINote then.

# Chapter 18: Let's try Killing part.3

“... Not much change from upstairs huh”

Yea, Futaba-san curtly replies. Her face being clouded to the utmost, I can tell without looking back.

We advance through a now-all-too-familiar stone passage in that slightly strained and awkward atmosphere.

Having rested and slept, not really feeling like diving into this hopeless dungeon, we decided to head in nonetheless.

Futaba-san's depressed state had shown no changes after having woken up. For the time, I did do my best on the follow up, saying that I didn't mind about the failure with the Red Dog; since I felt it couldn't be helped, and then, also explained what I thought about Psyche Skills.

I mean, there's no way a girl would cheer up with just those words... so I said something like *we can get it on the next try*, and with that, we return to the present of us traversing the dungeon, ever so cautious.

And so, we've been walking nearly an hour. We've passed many a stone passage, going left and right at intersections, sometimes passing through Forested Domes like before; we kept walking.

All the while, we haven't encountered a single Monster; what is this even? Not even a Fang Rat. Maybe there's the Class Rep party, or some other classmates preceding us, eliminating all the monsters on their path?

Though well, we heard cawing from a crow-like bird in a Forested Dome, so it's not like the place is completely devoid of fauna.

May be that it's plain good luck. If everything's started going us, I'd gladly take this opportunity, and hope we can be blessed with a wonderful levelup right about n—

I let out a sound just as we were approaching a bend in the passage. Just as we were turning, and the scape of what lay beyond entered my field of vision, I

backed away to escape from the 'thing' that caught my eye.

"Stop"

Her large body trembling, Futaba-san managed to not scream out, and with a start, halted her steps. Displaying a hand sign to 'wait' behind me, I slither towards the bend and take a peek.

"...Goma"

There's no mistaking that filthy, black body akin to a cockroach.

Beyond this bend, there is a large path with a width similar to a 2-way road. Both sides were lined with numerous trees like in a Forested Dome. Of course, they weren't being maintained at all, and the twisted, overgrown branches took over a significant amount of the space. To pass through, we had to traverse the meter~3.3feet of gap right in the middle.

And beyond that overrun, treelined path, looks around 30 meters~100feet away, there was a single Goma.

"E, GueEEE... GeaAAA!"

"Hii!?"

I hear Futaba-san leaking a scream behind me. I mean, when I heard the Goma's cry from all the way over there, even I thought my heart stopped.

"It's okay Futaba-san, calm down. That Goma, isn't gonna attack"

"E-eh... how can you tell?"

"It's fallen over"

Yes, that Goma, it was collapsed face down.

I checked to make sure one more time, but it was indeed powerlessly keeled over. Since we heard its cry, there's no doubt it's alive... though looking closer, I saw a pool of blood around the Goma.

"I think, it's fatally injured and can't anymore"

Futaba-san comes sliding towards the corner to peek at the state of affairs herself. My eyesight isn't bad enough to warrant glasses, and Futaba-san isn't of the meganekkoglasses-girl archetype either. We wouldn't mistake an injured

Goma.<sup>[1]</sup>

Having completely made sure, within tension and unease, I make a warped smile and say,

“It’s here, our 2<sup>nd</sup> chance”

“Eh, that’s... you don’t mean...”

“We’re gonna kill that Goma”

Just when I thought they weren’t coming at all, a weakened, solitary Monster, the ideal prey was right there. We can’t let this chance go.

“It’s ok, if we do it like with the Red Dog, it’ll work”

“B-but... I...”

Her big-bodied trembling and tears collecting around the eyes were, eh... can’t be helped. After all, we haven’t solved the problem of mental fortitude at all. If we do it like last time, her spear will definitely stop yet again.

And I haven’t found any ground-breaking “*How to Stab: even Futaba-san can do it!*” method either.

“Okay, then this time, we can stab it together”

The two of us on our first joint mission, I dub it, *let’s cut that cake, stab it to shreds*. I know it’s an offhanded and spontaneous naming, but couldn’t you’ve done better, me!

“Y-yeah... Alright! I can, if it’s with Momokawa-kun, I can do it!”

Eh, for real, you really got motivated from this lamebrain method? I mean, I did say it but... yeah, just as she said, this time, she’s positively burning with fighting spirit, so I’ll gladly take that.

Now, before the passion subsides, we’ll finish it in one go. Perhaps after this bout, all our problems will be solved, with a wonderful levelup and all.

First, and I had completely forgotten this with the Red Dog, I pop in a Power Seed.

It’s recommended to swallow the tiny, red berry without chewing. Since the



juice is extremely sour.

“—!? -!”

I'll just pretend not to notice Futaba-san's acutely puckered face. I had previously cautioned her, but it's easy to imagine her biting down hard from all the tension.

Any, we're now ready and set.

“Alright, now or never, let's go!”

Look right, look left, look right again, no other enemies sighted, affirmative. Futaba-san and I leap out into the path in synchronous, and close in the collapsed, bloodied Goma.

Heat rising from the center of my body came from the quick-action effects of the Power Seed. It's not like a fever, but feels more like the kind of warmth you get after a good set of warmup exercises.

Thanks to which, disregarding the fatigue from walking all the way here, my feet on the stone paving feel immensely light.

“OO! GebUReaA!?”

“Kyaa—!”

We had no Assassin-like techniques to conceal our presence, and were boldly running through the path, which the Goma immediately saw. The muddy yellow eyes glaring at us, it shouted, I don't know if in a language or just shrieking, but in an aggravated tone nonetheless.

Futaba-san's own cry, was perhaps from seeing the menacing reaction from the Goma. Or maybe, a branch had caught on her grand body, multiples of my size.

Whatever the case, the unmoving Goma could do nothing but cry out, and without any way to obstruct our advance, we quickly got in range for the spear to reach.

“—‘Blackhair Bind’!”

I had already finished the aria on the way here. And come now, invoked the

binding Curse. Maybe because I've done it once already, I could form the image much more clearly and the invocation process went smooth.

<i>Blackhair Bind</i>	Tentacles of black hair tangles onto the enemy. A maiden's hair is her life <sup>[2]</sup>
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The description coming to my head is this kind of useless thing, so it's leagues better to field-test it to gain mastery. The already brief description amended with further incomprehensible flavor text makes it even more annoying.

Leaving aside the quibbling, as if proving the cast successful, 'Blackhair Bind' manifested with even greater effect than with the Red Dog.

From the pool of blood around the Goma, the bundles of hair sprung forth, entangling its whole body. Focusing on the arms, the Goma was made fixed to the ground. The dirty black-brown body was tightly wrapped in glossy black hair.

Both the constrictive strength and the quantity of hair tentacles had augmented. It's likely not a levelup but original specs of the Curse being brought out.

Thinking from the opposite view, it won't get any better than this; but yeah, at present, this is definitely the Curse with the most immediate effect.

Anyway, with that, binding complete. Next, we stab. I guess this time I won't use 'Red Fever'. After all, using it or not, won't really change a thing.

"Futaba-san, just making sure, you can't do it alone?"

"U, uuu... C-can'ttt..."

While my spear is already raised overhead, edging to strike, Futaba-san was hugging hers with her log-like arms in a girly pose, trembling stalk still.

H-hot damn, that portion of the subtly thick branch-spear is completely buried between her chest, can't see it at all...

"DunGaAAA!"

Woah, sorry Goma-san. Ain't no time to be starin'.

"Okay, now, slowly, calmly... grab onto mine"

By which I mean grab 'my spear'. And without expressly offering that

correction, I went from the overhead pose, to one where I look like I've about to dig the ground with a shovel.

With 1 spear to be held by 2 people, I'm thinking this position is the best way to smoothly deliver a piercing blow to our grounded enemy.

"O-ok...gyuu!"

I wonder if there's any purpose in her voicing out her grabbing sound effect. Maybe it strengthens her resolve, or she's just going with the flow, it doesn't really bother me. With a face on the verge of crying, Futaba-san tightly grasped my spear.

With one hand.

"Right now would be a good time to let go of yours"

"A, y-you're exactly right!?"

The spear made a dry clanging as it was thrown away.

Once again, we use both hands. My twigs and Futaba-san's logs, a total of 4 hands grab on to the single spear.

"FuU, Uu,gubURUrU..."

I hear the Goma's rough breathing, and indecipherable whinges. But, it feels like it strangely went quiet.

Futaba-san and I are grabbing the spear together, and holding that position. We had quite an awkward stance because of the difference in height, but there'd be no problem stabbing this dying Goma.

We just need, one final push. Right now, the push, the resolution to lunge the spear.

"Ha, haah... fuu..."

I peak at her face to find tears already dropping. And dropping even larger drops of sweat, she had the pained face of a marathon runner right before the goal.

Her waterfall like perspiration isn't solely due to the Power Seed most likely.

"Futaba-san, eyes, close them"

“Mm... okay...”

The target wasn't even 10 cm~4inch from the roughly carved spear-tip. Accuracy would be 100% even with both eyes shut.

So to alleviate even a bit of the stress, she can seal her vision.

“Futaba-san, a bit less power please”

“... Yea”

For the past while, Futaba-san was shaking and stiff, grapping the spear so hard, I couldn't even make it budge with all my strength.

We can't go on like this.

Right now, Futaba-san didn't need didn't need the courage or guts to kill a Monster by her own hands. She only needs to know that the spear used to kill the Goma also had her hands on it, just that fact.

For now, that much is fine. It could become a trigger to let her think she can do it herself next time.

“Keep holding it, just like that”

After a bit of time, I feel Futaba-san finally easing her strength. With a light back and forth, Futaba-san's arms swayed together. She truly was only holding it.

Good, with that, the final piece of groundwork is done.

On my end, while I see the Goma as a Monster, its humanoid form stirs a resistance greater than with the Red Dog.

But that is only a feeling. In me, a hesitation in killing Monsters, that kind of delicate spirit, doesn't exist anymore.

“...Here we go, Futaba-san”

“Yeah, Momokawa-kun... sorry”

Her kindness pricks at my heart.

Don't apologize dammit. It's fine already. I mean, my actions can only, serve to taint you too.

I'll protect you. If I said that, it'd pretty much make me the manliest man around right.

But yeah, that's impossible for me. Personality-wise, and power-wise.

So, this is, just fine.

"YaAAAA!"

In the strike I landed while shaking off the light self-derision, contrary to my thoughts, the recoil was light.

"—moGYaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

A scream of such outrageous volume, I thought it travelled through the whole dungeon. As if the stone passages that already bounced sound well, were all focused solely on the death throes that this one immobile Goma mustered with the last of its all.

As if trying to tear apart its cheeks, the already large mouth stretched to the limit to scream out its loudest ever.

The tip of the spear was plunged quite deep into its flank. This crude spear, casually carved with the boxcutter had indeed torn the Goma's skin, impaled its meat.

The Goma's body was pierced through so anti-climatically, maybe Goma are actually pretty soft-bodied or it could be thanks to the Power Seed's boost. Right now, I didn't have the composure to calmly analyse.

"Again!"

As I draw out the spear, quite naturally, blood rushed out of the opened hole. Far from the familiar crimson, it was a muddy, red-brown tint. Maybe human blood is like this too, who knows.

The spouting blood gets on my indoor shoes, which are by now, completely dirtied from the day's walking, and it gets on the cuffs of my trousers, already smeared with mud and earth. It's pretty late to call it getting dirty, but other than the blood, the wound also produced a strange slimy gel-like substance, the sight of which gave me intolerable disgust.

Ah, feels sick, feels sick. So awful, fuck this, why do I, have to be here, the hell,

do I gotta do this for—

Forcefully holding back the sudden jolt of anxiety, the feeling of swallowing back vomit, I continue stabbing the Goma, wishing only to perfectly reap its life.

Again, Again. Another time, a third time... countless times. Single-mindedly, I stab.

“GI! iIIGeEEaA!”

Flank, stomach, chest, any big part I can lay my eyes on, I shred with the crude spear. Every time I do so with all my strength, the Goma raises agonizing cries as it writhes. Yet, the shackles of curse don't let it turn in the slightest.

I think I heard Futaba-san's screams mixed in with those of the pitiful Goma. Seems like she's shouting something, I think, maybe.

Maybe I was also shouting, don't really know.

“Haa... haa...”

It felt more tiresome than the time with the Red Dog.

I got that impression when the corpse before my feet had already suffered atrocious slaughter. Red-brown, dirty blood and chunks of gore. It has already stopped letting out noises from my stabbing.

“Uu, uu... M-Momokawa-kun... over? it's... over, right?”

In a fatigue and breathlessness as if I ran a 400 meter~quarter mile dash at breakneck pace, after a pause, not after 3 good pauses, I replied to the sobbing Futaba-san.

“It's over... The Goma, it's dead”

As I look, I see Futaba-san still has her eyes sincerely sealed tight. So you can shed tears even with your eyes closed. That, uselessly carefree impression floated to mind.

“I think, you shouldn't open your eyes yet”

“...Mm”

“Just walk a bit back, as you are”

“Mm... mm...”

This corpse, you don't need to see it. Especially since you had a hand in it's creation.

While considering these ways to avoid reality, Futaba-san and I succeeded in our Goma killing.

[2]R-reminds me of a certain maid...

# Chapter 19: Live Bait

“... Look’s terrible”

After guiding Futaba-san to a side of the passage, a minute, two... I took a dazed time-out for around 5 minutes, only after which, I got myself together, went to inspect the Goma’s corpse, and let out the preceding line.

The body was bloody to the point that I couldn’t even tell how many times I’d stabbed it. The brutality was on the level you’d see in some B-Horror films.

Well, I did hear that when you consciously commit murder for the first time, it’s often the case that you get too worked up and end up with a sever case of overkill, so this kind of result isn’t something I can’t say I expected.

Still, perhaps I’m not feeling so much of a repugnance to this kind of rated R-18 gore in real life, is because it is something I myself produced. Could be that my sensitivity has dulled quite a bit from my brief experience of dungeon life.

Since I can regain calm in just a bit of time, that theory may not be far from the truth. I didn’t learn any Psyche Skill though.

Anyway, my state of mind, I’ll leave be. Let’s just finish up with the Goma and get out of here.

I didn’t expect any Core from the Red Dog but this Goma may just have a fragment or two. In addition, though crude, these humanoid Goma do carry weapons. Futaba-san’s story had indeed touched on ones using bows for ranged combat.

Implying, this is our chance to get gear.

“Huh, this guy’s—”

Yet, when I observe again, or rather, plainly looked at the Goma, I realized.

“—got nothing on at all!?”

*P-pervert!* I’d shout but my disappointment was a bit greater.

Yup, whichever way I look at it, this guy’s just plain butt naked.



Actually, this is the first time I've seen a Goma from so close. First time I witnessed the creature was a scene where I was peeking at them gorging on a girl from slightly far away.

Getting a better look, I can see that not only is their skin reminiscent of cockroaches, but they're different from humans at the musculo-skeletal level.

Their height is less than that of an adult man, around my height quite frankly, but looking at that black, slimy, humanoid form makes me equate it to a primate like the orangutan rather than a person. Their image could be best described as one of primitive man, a hunched posture, short legs, and long arms, ones you can find in an animal encyclopedia.

Though, I can't really tell if it's male or female. I happen to glance at its nether regions, but that didn't help at all. Of course, touching to see if it's got one or not, doesn't even cross my mind.

Even if Goma were unisex creatures, that information is something I give not one fuck about.

"Damn... this guy's really got nothing at all..."

I don't care if you got no undies but at least have a knife or something. This dungeon's chock full of vile Monsters you hear. Why'd you gotta prance around in your birthday suit, dumbass.

No, well, maybe normal Goma are like monkeys and live naked in the wild.

Maybe those ones dining on that girl were a special class amongst Goma like Hunter or Warrior; those who go out to hunt Monsters and are given the privilege of clothing and weapons.

Shit, just stop thinking about Goma ecology already. Rather than info, I need some physical loot here.

"... Hm?"

C'mon, something, anything; I stare intensely at the Goma's remains with bloodshot eyes, when I realize.

There's, way too many wounds.

No, you're the one who did that remember, I'd like to self-retort but that's

not it. Certainly, I had stabbed it countless times, but area I did that on was only one.

Basically, in my high-tension, frenzied state, I could only manage to hit the biggest part *i.e.* the trunk of its body. I was not at all in the frame of mind to go for the head or any kind of vitals.

Meaning, injuries from my spear didn't exist on it's face or limbs. Nonetheless,

“This cut here... may be a knife”

The Goma's arms and legs had deep wounds even amateurs could distinguish. These wounds were rough yet certainly ran in a line, they'd in no way be from claws of something like an Armor Bear.

Dare I say, from dulled knives, yes, those same rusted knives carried by Goma; Like it was forcefully stabbed at the same places by those very knives.

The precise positions of those wounds would be, on the calves of both legs and the upper part of the left arm. For some reason, the right arm was left alone.

“Just what, was it that attacked it?”

In this otherworld, Monsters with severe wounds suddenly popping up in dungeons, meant to become mobs to kill for delicious bonus exp, would obviously— be really too good to be true. At least for me, apart from the whole magic thing, everything appears to follow the physical laws just like on Earth.

Thus, since it's injured, there is necessarily a cause to be found. Considering it's a dungeon, the most likely cases would be: unforeseen accident, or attacked by Monsters.

There's an exception at present where us humans are also fighting Monsters... and if this Goma had been in combat with a student, there's no reason to leave it be after some damage to the limbs.

This situation was just as if the purpose was to immobilize the Goma, aiming to injure but not kill; as if that was the attacker's true objective.

But then, for what intent?

The questions keep rising. I feel like the protagonist of a mystery. What secrets lie in the body, through the art of deduction—

“...Momokawa-kun”

With a *shock!* my body jolts hard quite pathetically from the sudden voice. *No, no, that didn't scare me at all*, I pretend as I turn around.

“Futaba-san, alright now?”

“Ah, yeah... I'm fine, so...”

That pale complexion doesn't look fine at all, but I won't push the point. She must be, working hard in her own way.

“So, what's up?”

“Yeah, umm... the Core, we should get it, right?”

From her fidgety way of asking, I quickly got her point.

“Oh yeah Futaba-san, you did say you're used to handling Cores”

“Yeah”

In Futaba-san's previous dungeon adventures, her only usefulness in the Class Rep party was that of extracting Cores. Luckily her skill in cooking is quite the thing and dismantling these Monsters went splendidly, is apparently the case.

Matter of fact, now that it's a simple corpse, she shouldn't carry so much reluctance. If the dead body's fine, I'd have thought killing it would garner the same emotion, but apparently, that's not the case.

“But you don't have any knives though, is that alright? I mean, we only got the cutter”

“It's alright, I think... I've handled some Goma before, and the Core isn't too deep inside, I think I can do it”

Oh, such reassuring words. I guess it's that thing where everyone has their strong points.

“Alright, it's all yours”

“Ok, leave it to me, no problem!”

And when I went to hand my boxcutter to the slightly less pallid Futaba-san, shoving my hand into my gakuran uniform pocket, searching for 3 seconds, grabbing the required plastic article, and offering it as if *here, a gift*; right then.

“Ah, Momokawa-kun, this Goma, it’s holding something?”

“Eh, no way”

*This naked fella?* I thought, but looking where Futaba-san was indicating, there was indeed a ‘something’.

“The hell’s, this...”

What I see, is the Goma holding a small bag in it’s right hand. Yes, a truly small, crude bag of brown pelt, small enough to be completely covered by the palm. With only a quick lookover, I didn’t notice.

“I wonder what... it’s white, powder?”

Futaba-san spread open the Goma’s right hand without the slightest hesitation and retrieved the bag. Even though I felt so disgusted at the Goma’s corpse, needed so long just to gather the guts to touch it... what can I say, nothing less from a master of the kitchen who’s even chopped up Monsters.

As I raise my opinion of Futaba-san by another point, I stare at the mystery bag of white powder in her hand.

“Hmm, this is...”

It a glance, it seemed like wheat flour, or potato starch, it couldn’t be described as anything other than pure white power. I also notice that the Goma’s bloodstained right hand has bits of this powder on it here and there.

Before wondering what, white power, the first thing to pop in mind were those illegal substances.

“Kay, let’s see here... when ingested, it uplifts the spirit and eases fatigue, you get into a state of extreme high, and furthermore, has a strong addiction factor— wait, this *is* a drug!”

“Eeeh, d-drugs!?”

Via ‘Intuition Pharmacy’, I learned the characteristics of this white powder,

this Goma-made drug.

If this Goma was on a trip from this narcotic, and decided to run around bare naked in the dungeon, then that's all good. If this one's got an extra dose of stupid compared to the average unintelligent Goma, then that's all there is to it.

However, even that most likely scenario doesn't hold given the fact that those wounds exist on the Goma's limbs.

Right, this one's had its limbs cut by some thing, making it unable to move, and then given this bag of drugs; I can't think of any other scenario.

Therefore, the culprit must be—

“W-w-wha-wha-what, do I do with this, Momokawa-kun!?”

Futaba-san holds out the bag of narcotics, panicking as if she's got a time bomb in her hands.

“Calm down, it's fine as long as you don't breathe it in”

“B-but...”

“Ah, ok, fine, I'll hold on to it for... you...”

Reaching out my hands, my movements stop. In front of me is Futaba-san; the glimpse of those 'things' behind her, seeing those I turn stiff.

“W-what's wrong, Momokawa-kun?”

Seeing me suddenly stop. Seeing my face probably paling in fear, Futaba-san asks uneasily.

It's unfortunate but right now, I can't say 'it's fine'. No words of relief, nor those of comfort would escape my mouth. What I voice, would only be the cruelest of realities.

“I-it's bad... we, fell for it...”

“Eh—”

And turning around to follow where I'm looking, Futaba-san screaming so loud as if the stone passage would break, was the natural result. I mean, I even feel like screaming with her.

Reason being, right there, there were—

“Damn it all... the Goma, got us surrounded...”

## Chapter 20: Goma Trap

Implying, this injured Goma was made bait to lure in prey.

Not letting live or die, cutting the limbs to forbid movement. Moreover, leaving it some narcotics, it would become a lively bait that lets out a boisterous shout. The individual itself would use the drug to ease its pain. The right arm left untouched only for it to apply said drug.

Maybe this way of cruelly making bait of its own comrades is a tradition of Goma, or it could be that the students kept hunting the Monsters of this floor so well, it became an emergency situation that required such drastic measures, but anyway, at the current time, they've gone and done it.

And there happened to exist an idiot that would fall for this blatantly obvious trap.

Right, that would be me. Goddammit, I should have suspected something the moment I saw that fallen Goma. Encountering a conveniently weakened prey like that stray Red Dog twice, that kind of coincidence never happens.

“Wh, wh, w-w-w-what do we do now, Momokawa-kun!?”

*That's what I wanna say, I can't say. No time to say.*

At this time, we were at a T-junction like area, and Goma were piling in from all three of those directions. Taking to account the time we took killing that Goma, taking a break from the shock, and then inspecting the corpse till just now, it'd be ample time to block our path.

Each path is crowded with around 10 of them. I can see ones carrying worn out bows scattered among them, but they aren't shooting. I guess they don't feel the need to.

As if excited by the fact that they've successfully surrounded us, the Goma were increasingly excited, going *Gae Ghae* in their hoarse cries, having quite a blast as if their game was already in the bag.

“G-gotta... just, break through somehow...”

Can't think of anything better, don't think it'll go well either. My voice as I made the suggestion is literally shaking right now.

Still, we have to do it.

The path going straight had dead trees spread on both sides, it's the way we came in. This path is wider than the two going left and right, but the twisted, crazy overgrown trees will make escape harsh.

Having said that, the other two paths are even more impossible. Their widths narrow, the way is totally blockaded by a fence of Goma. I can't see a single gap to sneak past from.

"We'll go straight. Right down the mid... no, a little to the left, the one with the bone club. I'll stop it with 'Blackhair Bind', so we'll push it aside and break through."

"G-got it!"

Pretty good for an instant plan I'd say. If we had an Attack Skill right now, breaching through wouldn't even be an issue... no, now's not the time for that.

"Now, go! Entwine its escape, with weaving hair—"

Getting the aria done first, I run at once. Futaba-san's following right behind.

Thinking in terms of physical charging power, she'd be way over me, but it'd be a problem if she froze up right before contact. Can't say I'm overly confident in my own tackle strength, but right now, I have to run up front.

Okay, distance to Goma, less than 20 meters~65feet. The bloodstained spear in my hands feel unnecessarily heavy. Ah, that reminds me, Futaba-san had thrown hers away.

We could've rushed in, both a spear in hand, and maybe the enemy would even falter a bit... but can't really do that anymore.

The Goma in front of us weren't particularly showing any fear or worry at us charging in, they weren't looking panicked at all. In fact, when they only pointed their weapons towards us saying *Gue Guae*, it felt as if they said, *look at that fatty and pipsqueak pointlessly resisting*, sneering at us.

I fucking get it already. This is just a struggle in vain, I know. But we can't help



it. This is our all, it's also our only.

“—Blackhair Bind!”

The Curse I unleashed with a shout wringing out all my breath manifested itself right as I aimed.

The target being the club-wielding Goma was grabbed by the legs with the tentacles of hair suddenly sprouting from the ground, and fell forward. It seems that one was particularly stupid, without doing any actions to ease its fall, it bashed face first into the hard stone floor.

“GugEe!”

“Now!”

Not letting the opening from that pathetic fall pass by, we went full die hard and aimed for the home stretch.

But yet, faster than I could slide my body through, the Goma next to it came in to cover. They're stupid, but maybe they understand we're aiming there. Could also be that they're simply chasing me like a newbie soccer player only chasing the ball.

In any case, we're quickly approaching collision. That in mind, I'll just have to give them another one.

“YaAAAAAAAAAAA!”

Taking the spear in my hands, I thrust towards the Goma with a knife blocking in path.

I don't have the power to sparingly take down a Goma 1v1, and in fact, there's a higher risk of me losing, but this time, I'll have to win.

It's a crude weapon made simply by sharpening a branch, but it does indeed have the length to deem it a 'spear'. There's that saying about needing 3 times a Kendo dan, so this reach that I possess will become my absolute advantage.<sup>[1]</sup>

Letting myself go with the momentum, I stab at the Goma, brandishing only a short knife, from a safe distance. Maybe the Power Seed was still in effect, but again, with a feeling softer than I imagined, the tip pierces through its black flesh.

But no matter how delicate it may be, it became a resistance enough to stop my feet.

“—kuu!”

The shock from going at it with all my power causes my feet to stumble. If I fall here, I die. With that desperate cause, I reclaim my footing.

At some point, I'd let go of my spear. The knife-wielding Goma was fallen over with the Fairy Walnut branch stuck in its gut, spouting noisy groans along with blood from its mouth. It wasn't instant death, but it's only a matter of time.

And with it having blocked my advance, a small but definitive lost time was created. This lost time proved enough for another, a different Goma from the one I stabbed, to jump in.

Weaving through the branches of the white, dead trees, a new Goma made its appearance. With around half the blade chipped off, it held it its hands, a hatchet. One hit from that and I'd be writhing on the floor, crying out much louder than the Goma.

No wait, having stopped and let go of the spear, I don't have a single way to block—

“WaAAAAAAAAA!”

Just then, charging in while screaming, came a giant shadow. Naturally, it's Futaba-san. She was running behind me, but as I'd stopped, she'd caught up, and now passed me.

“Gii!?”

And as she was cutting through, she hit the Goma that had jumped in. The goma of around same size and stature as me is flicked away by Futaba-san's titanic mass, and flies beyond the branches of the dead trees. On the other side, having not even realized she'd bumped into a Goma, Futaba-san only keeps running ahead.

This difference in weight, such thing being overwhelming to a level that high was made painfully clear to me.

No, forget that; having inadvertently avoided that crisis, now's my chance to

get away.

I'll just quickly make a turn, follow behind Futaba-san and get out—

“Wah!?”

Just as I took a step, my body fell forward from the momentum.

Something caught my leg— as I thrust my hands forward to break my fall, and felt the prickling sensation of pain on my palms, I realized.

“Sh-shidd this fucker!”

It caught my leg, as in, that Goma I had tripped over using Blackhair Bind, it grabbed my leg with its hand.

Both legs were bound, but it had skillfully maneuvered itself, and reached for my leg. Luckily, it had let go of its club as it fell, and I'd avoided that counter attack, but what it did achieve was more than enough to cost my life.

“Shit, god fucking dammmiiiiiiiit!</i></span>

Jamming my right hand into my gakuranuniform pocket, in less than a second I take out the boxcutter I'd meant to lend to Futaba-san for dismantling work. With its characteristic clicking sounds, the blade was now completely out, at which point, a total of 2 seconds must have passed.

And by the 3<sup>rd</sup> second, I'd slashed at the Goma's hand in all my rage.

“UgeEEe!”

Seems it didn't have the guts to keep holding after having deeply cut with the fresh blade. Spilling its filthy blood, it moves its hand away from my ankle as if withdrawing.

“Haa... haa... G-gotta, run—”

I stood up in a panic, but it was too late.

“GrrRRr...”

“GekgeGuGE”

In front of me stands two Goma. From the right, from the left, every single Goma on this passage were creeping in to surround me.

To call it a matter of course, well, that'd only be right. Stabbing with a spear, falling over, slashing. With that many distractions, there was more than ample time to completely encircle me.

“Aa, aaa...”

I stand with my knees almost giving out, swing around my measly, unreliable, blood-stuck boxcutter.

It wasn't thin enough to somehow charge through anymore. Front, back, left, right, the Goma savagely laughing at me from all sides, had doubled, no, tripled in number.

The ones in front of me, as in, the Goma occupying the direction we were running towards; beyond them, I catch sight of Futaba-san's back running away at full speed without the slightest hint of turning around.

She's still screaming out, single-mindedly escaping at full force. Even if I shouted out for help, it wouldn't reach her ears.

No well, even if she heard, it's simply impossible for Futaba-san to save me.

No Betrayal or abandonment, strangely, I didn't even feel any resent. That being said, neither was there a gallant feeling of, *at least let her be safe* or something like that.

What occupied my heart was an empty resignation. *Give it up. Ah, well, can't be helped. This was only natural.*

I accepted reality as is.

I mean, it's obvious. I haven't done anything for her. No, I guess I saved her life, but that's it. I still haven't built her up with the strength and mind to bravely take on Monsters.

And let's say in the million to 1, the billion to 1 chance that Futaba-san does come back to help. Even say she gains the courage to valiantly fight to save me... there would still be no miracle. With that Skill set of hers, she can't do a thing against this many Goma.

To conclude, I can't rely on being saved at all.

And what I can't rely on even more, that would my own strength. Not a thing

for offence, defence, or retreat; with a shit Skill set that constitutes the Shaman, I can't do a thing being thus greatly outnumbered.

Ah, yeah. I'll accept it. Right now, I'm checked... and mated.

"U-uaaAAAA!"

But, no dammit. I don't wanna die.

Even realizing the futility of my resistance, I couldn't stop swinging the only weapon I had on hand.

My boxcutter, with its reach going only as far as that of a knife, only cut the vacant air.

"Gugee, gekGEKgee"

"GugeGE!"

The Goma laugh at my fruitless resistance. These Monsters with their neanderthalic minds, they are sneering at man.

Shit, shit... fucking shit...

"Ow!?"

"GiyAu!?"

My side was pricked. Likely with something long like a spear. I didn't see it coming, but in my state of absolute fear and despair, my field of view had greatly constricted. Everywhere aside from straight ahead, I was simply blind.

Even this wide open target got away with only a flesh wound because of 'Pain Return'.

I see a Goma groaning, holding its right side exactly where it hit me.

"T-that right... you cut me... you get cut, right back!"

Ahaha, how's that, awesome that's what, that's my Curse. Kill me and you die. Any of you bastards, feel like dying—

Right when I had so exclaimed, this time, a different Goma cried out. My leg was cut. Left thigh. The wound was shallow, but the pain burned all the same.

"A-aah... ow, shit, ouch..."

When I touched the wound with my left hand in an attempt to suppress it, I directly felt the dripping of blood. It's much less serious than one from the Armor Bear, but experiencing that disastrous experience in no way meant I developed some resistance to light wounds. In fact, my fear of bleeding to death even increased.

Yet, this flowing blood, didn't really feel like mine. Maybe the fear is paralyzing my thoughts, leading to this fuzzy sense of reality.

"A-ow!"

At some point, while raising pathetic cries of pain, I had dropped my boxcutter, my sole weapon. This time the attack came from a club. Aiming for my forearm, the strike relieved me of my weapon.

I looked, and found the assailing Goma holding its forearm, its club making an annoying clanging as it had been dropped. 'Pain Return' is working just fine. *Serves you*, I can't really bring myself to say.

What flowed into my mind just now, was the event that I considered my most humiliating in my short 17 years of life. It was a line from that scene.

"Saitou, beat Momokawa's shit in for a bit"

*How's my idea, genius ain't it!* I see his full on smug face in my mind saying that.

Yeah, right, you're right Higuchi... that greatest weakness of 'Pain Return' you found, I'm in the middle of it having tested out right now.

Back then, the one to attack me was that bastard Masaru who was in the position of Higuchi's slave. So he absolutely wouldn't go as far as killing.

However, right now, the attackers numbered close to thirty. One punch per Goma, and while they're just a bit hurt, I'm in tatters.

I don't know if these Goma realized the principle of 'Pain Return'. Whether they get it or not doesn't matter much, as they've already actualized a plan of attack against me.

Ah, hell. I could be dragging in the one that delivers the finisher, but at that point, what meaning is there, really. These guys use their own as bait. Having

one more die, they won't even bat an eye.

Dying is bad as is, but dying meaninglessly is much worse. At least let me curse the one that did me in—

With their next attack, that feeling too shattered like glass, into a myriad of pieces. It was a fragile dream. Real death, such a thing is much more miserable, irrational, abrupt, swift.

Fight back? How foolish. Thoughts that would only emerge from worthless self-respect. You could even say it's that I'm unwilling to accept my utter powerlessness.

When exposed to insurmountable violence, your pride has no choice but to collapse like a house of cards, or more like, a house of feathers.

At the point I was kicked from behind, falling towards the floor, I realized all this.

"U, ah... sto"

A disgusting black foot that would make even one stuck bare into the gutters feel clean; belonging to a Goma, those kind of revolting foot appears at the tip of my nose— the time I finished thinking that, a kick had already landed at the base of my chin.

A dizzying shock. Is this called seeing stars? Staggered and in pain, my body that was falling forward innately turned around.

A dark ceiling. The white light panel that seemed like it could go out any moment felt like it was a metaphor for my remaining lifespan.

But as if complaining to me to *stop being so fucking sentimental*, my vision again fills in black. There were spots of white scattered, sand. It was the sole of a Goma's foot.

"Hii—"

Even before I could instinctively move my arms to cover, the stomping commences. Straight on the nose. Stopped breathing for a moment.

"Ka, ha, a... Aa..."

An intense yet dull pain spread from the center of my face along with blood from my nose. Nose must've broke, at least a fracture. This would be my first broken bone, and also the first time blood flowed from both my nostrils.

Right now I must have the ugliest face I've ever had. It's much worse than when Masaru beat me up.

My spirit isn't much better either. I mean, I've already—

“Uu, Aa... sto... Stop...”

Next, a kick to the guts which I withstood— only to vomit. Yet right after, a different Goma delivered a Yakuza Kick as the same spot.<sup>[2]</sup>

There was no use in enduring. At this point I was writhing out with *Guee guee* sounds not all too indistinguishable from the Gomas' own vulgar cries.

The nasal sanguine and bile spread around and smeared my face. Awful. It came from me, but it's nonetheless gross.

Not just my face, even my heart felt filthy. It was a corrosion to the depths of my heart which crumbled my spirit.

As if my heart was a pillar, and its base became black and corroded, finally toppling over, that kind of feeling. No, just now, I've certainly... heard the sound of my heart getting crushed.

“Please... Stop...”

I begged for dear life.

Quite miserable, foolish words. But I said them the same. Someone weak as me, simply, can't help but say them. Even if they're facing Monsters who would never understand.

“GugEee!”

With a Goma's energetic, fun-filled cry, the lynching carries on. Feet, feet, filthy feet. They intently keep bashing with their feet.

Because of 'Pain Return', a Goma can't kick in repeatedly. Since the damage goes back and cause them to stagger. It must hurt to a degree. Thanks to which, the rate I'm getting knocked about was, in itself, gentle.



“Sto...sta...aa...”

But this kicking marathon wasn't stopping anytime soon. Is it really that fun? Does their entertainment only consist of harassing weak prey? I keep waiting, but none of them take a weapon to let it end.

That's good— I end up thinking, wonder why?

Help isn't coming. Can't do a thing myself. Even though after this, my body would eventually reach its limit, even though I'd just be tortured, kicked to death like this. Even though the only thing remaining in my life was pain and violence.

—I don't wanna die.

A feeling spurting from the bits collecting into a mountain of trash, bits that were once my heart and my pride.

—I don't wanna die.

Embers of survival instinct.

No... never... don't wanna... die—

“—ooOOOOO”

A voice, I think I heard. Within my hazy conscience, the roar that beat into my eardrums, was unmistakably not one of the *Gyaagyaas* of the Gomas' jolly making.

I could say that with a conviction, this voice was of that different a nature.

To say it another way, a voice that caused a tremor in the very depths of the soul. Like a wind that returns the once embers into a blaze— a powerful voice.

“ooOOOOOOOAAA/

Yes, that was indeed, the roar of a mad beast.

[1]So 3x Kendo dan, it's apparently something that originated from the manga Karate Master, where it says that you need at least a 3 times higher degree of mastery in hand to hand combat to match up against Kendo, which uses a sword. So Momo-kun's saying *his spear > Goma knife*.

# Chapter 21: Mania

“ooOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA/

A dreadful shout I could only describe as a mad beast’s roar tore into my eardrums.

The moment I thought *what*, with a *bang!* comes a shockwave through the stone floor as if it was struck with a hammer. With the intensity of the reverberations, my hazy conscience came crystal clear.

With a rejuvenated vividness, what entered my field of vision was the sandy stone floor. I guess, obviously I’d be looking at nothing but earth since I’d fallen over.

So turning away from the floor, what now landed on my eyes were but the unsightly black feet of Goma— and also, somehow, a terribly familiar pair of sneakers.

White with red lines, these shoes were the same design as the ones I had on, Shiramine Academy’s 2<sup>nd</sup> year 11th grade indoor shoes. The fierce impact assailing the floor wasn’t the head of a steel hammer but apparently, the rubber soles of these shoes.

All put together, right now was the reality that, in front of me stands some classmate of mine.

Well no, not really *some* classmate, there could be but one.

“Fu, taba...-san...”

I intended to say her name normally, but it came out quite cracked and the volume was off. My throat was stuck. Which can’t really be helped accounting for the nasty taste of ferrous blood spreading all over the inside of the mouth.

Once again retaining the pain all over my body, I look up to confirm the owner of those indoor shoes.

Futaba Meiko. From height, to girth, to bust, to hip, boasting a size greater than the standard in all those aspects, there be but one in the whole of class 2—

7. And a girl who had become my ally, the one and only.

That her presence wasn't some convenient illusion I'm seeing at death's door, is evidenced by the pain in my body. Above all, that presence of hers standing dauntingly before me, felt increasingly overwhelming.

And, that's exactly why, I can't believe it.

That Futaba-san came back. That she jumped right into this horde. And mostly, that she was the one who released that tremendous roar.

My building a team with Futaba-san has been for quite the short time, a shallow relation; but I have an adequate grasp of her frailness, her naivete, her kindness. It's because I know all that, that I can't believe it.

And I could only convince myself that this is reality, that the one standing before me is Futaba Meiko herself, was by perceiving her to have undergone an 'abnormality'.

**"KoOOOOOO"**

An eerie breath. As she exhaled I undoubtedly saw coming from her mouth, along with her breath, a red mist-like something.

No, looking carefully, that red mist was being exuded from all over her body like steam. Almost as if, the blood in her body was vaporizing out, cladding her in a coat of red fumes; ascribing a ferocity unseen in man.

And strangest of all, was her face.

Eyes bloodshot as if she'd pulled all-nighters 3 days straight, her pupils glowed deeper than blood, yes, they truly dazzled as if LEDs had been jammed in there, eyes of crimson.

The penetrating glow of those eyes glared at the surrounding Goma. Deep creasing above the nose, brows raised to the limit, as if leering at her bitter enemy, it was an look of true rage.

That face was simply too different from the one I've come to recognize on Futaba-san. Her eyes had always seemed to be anxious like that of an abandoned pup. Her worried brows made a 人\ shape, starting to apologize for the littlest things, and when anything happened, she cried. Her spirit as small as

her body big, that kind of, a timid girl. That is anything and everything I know of the one known as Futaba Meiko.

**“WoOAAAAAAAAA!”**

That crazed shout exited from her own mouth, as if crumbling her image from the very root, turning it on its end and smashing it to pieces.

The utter ferocity startles the surrounding Goma, making them tremble slightly. Adding in myself, I too shivered with a completely different feeling from the one just recently when my life was in danger.

Futaba-san. Just what in the world happened to her— *how*, in the middle of that thought, she moved.

She raises high a tightly clenched fist. And then swings it down on a Goma, more than a head shorter, standing before her.

**“GebU—”**

The Goma’s head blew off. Like a tomato, easily bursting into a mess.

With a single stroke of fist, a cranium with size and toughness at least as much as that of a human, was pulverized. That strike is already beyond a fist. I’m doubting whether even a strongman with a steel sledgehammer can output that kind of force.

**“GugeEA—!”**

The ones raising a beastly cry this time, were Goma. Brandishing their weapons, all the ones in front simultaneously leapt towards Futaba-san’s large frame that was releasing a red aura.

Facing that with a glare of seething anger, and taking a wide stance, Futaba-san—

**“Gaa!”**

A clothesline. With her right arm, she mows down the enemy. In just that, the Goma dance in the air like leaves hoisted up by a gust of air. Not just the ones attacking, even the ones nearby biding their time to attack next were carried along as extras.<sup>[1]</sup>

The ones taking the brunt of her arm had their arms and body broken down as if they'd taken a fullswing from a major league cleanup hitter. What lay ahead as they flew from the impact was a net-like mesh of branches. The lucky ones would avoid colliding head on with the wall, small branches cushioning their arrival, but may they happen upon a branch even slightly too thick, they'd instantly become fresh skewers. A spectacle I could describe as a Mozu's Morning Sacrifice came to be all to quickly.<sup>[2]</sup>

“Gugu... uGee...”

The Goma were now clearly wavering. There weren't any more coming to Futaba-san.

Intelligence aside, this must be their survival instinct working. Having seen how they were shut down with immense power right upon approach, there's no way they wouldn't get it.

That being said, their sense of greed wouldn't allow them to give up on the delicious prey that is humans.

As a result, the Goma froze up. That being at present, a most foolish action. So after that point... it became nothing but, a one-sided massacre.

**“VuUUAaAAAAA!”**

With an ear-numbing cry, Futaba-san charges into the troop of Goma.

I suddenly remember a tragic incident that happened a while back where a car drove into a line of commuting gradeschoolers. I'm sure there too the situation was just as gruesome.

The Goma are of the similar height as me, of small build. Those small bodies waltzed into the air, one after the other. The others run over. The unlucky who had fallen down where Futaba-san was stepping, they were made a mess from her 100 kilos220 pounds of pure stompage. In her each step, a Goma's head, or guts, or limbs, all were mercilessly crushed underfoot.

This underfoot splatter wasn't something intentionally committed by Futaba-san. It was simply a matter of a Goma having fallen at a place where she would step.

So the ones she was looking at, aiming at, were still the ones in front of her, the ones holding weapons.

“Gue, Ee—”

From scattered directions, come attacks from rusted blades. In other words, lunges.

Futaba-san who looks like she's gone insane with rage, took practically no evasive action. As her body was big, so was their target. When attacked, it would inevitably hit. There would be injuries and even bleeding.

“—GoaAAAAAAAAAA!”

But, that had no effect on her. I'd heard of Indian warriors who would keep on attacking even after receiving low calibre bullets; right now, Futaba-san felt just like one of those.<sup>[3]</sup>

Not even minding the blades thrust at her, she continues swinging her one hit kill arms. The Goma are successively blasted away, bashed down, bursted under foot.

Among them are those grabbed by the foot and swung around.

The weight of a single Goma, deducing from its looks and from the damage I took when they kicked me, I'd wager they're anywhere from 40 to 60 kilos~ 90 — 130 pounds. At the least, Futaba-san could single-handedly swing around a thin-ish girl in junior high without breaking a sweat.

Firmly gripping a Goma's ankle, she swings it wide. Movements much more natural than when she was raising the spear of Fairy Walnut tree.

Immediately after, she bashes it down to the floor. The sound of a wet towel smacked hard against washroom's tiles— echoed repeatedly.

As if she's mistaking the Goma for a sturdy club, Futaba-san swings it left and right. The splattering blood at every swing, did it belong to the weapon, or to the ones of the same species being bashed by said weapon?

Quite a few Goma had morphed into crushed gore. The surrounding branches are darkened as if coated with some 10s of litres of red paint.

“Fu, fuh!”

A rough breathing Futaba-san, her shining red eyes searched for scampering prey, but at this point, none of those were left.

There appeared to be a lucky few Goma that escaped the terror of the slaughterhouse, as I heard pitiful screams from the depths of the dim passage. That was the only proof of any living Goma, and the ones remaining at the scene, retained form only as a sea of dirty blood, and chunks of meat.

**“Fu, fuU...”**

Releasing dense red smoke, Futaba-san draws large breaths. But these deep breaths don't seem to have any effect in calming her. With hoarse breaths like a hungry beast, her shoulders heave up and down.

She was maintaining that state, when, as if suddenly remembering, she turned around. Slowly, towards me.

**“Fuu...u, Aah... Mo, Momoka... –ku...”**

She was still spilling red breath, and remained in her stern visage, but right then, she did indeed try to call out my name.

**“F-Futaba, –san...”**

Half the reason my returning her call was shaky, was because of the damage from the Goma lynching. The utter depth of emotion I felt towards my saviour that is she, dispersing the Goma and coming to my aid consisted— not of the other half.

That half was unfiltered fear. Unending unease. Devastating despair. With those feelings of defeat, my cracking voice and battered body shook.

**“Momo, kaWa, –kun”**

She calls out to me more distinctly than just before.

Her blazing red pupils shoot straight at me. As if other things, don't even register in her eyes. Without distraction or diversion, her gaze that falls on me and only me, was unbearably scary.

I mean come on. She really isn't ok in the head right now.

**“Mo, Momo... Ka, aAa...”**

“Hii!?”

Like a spirit holding a deep grudge, yet with the rawness of a zombie, she groaned out my name; When she did that and even took a step, I shouldn't be blamed for taking the natural course of action and frankly screaming.

A person who's clearly lost her head. I felt like I was facing one of those monstrous killers that appear in American horror flicks. And at the present situation, it's already a fact that Futaba-san carries monstrous powers enough to crush multitudes of Goma.

At her single whim, her single demonstration of power, I too would become one with the sea of blood surrounding us.

**“Mo, AaaAAA!”**

**“UwaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”**

Like an elephant charging at full strength, Futaba-san started running towards me, stomping over the blood and meat, creating a duet of objectionable sounds.

With intention, plus instinct, plus intuition, plus every other sense and feeling I had screaming out my quickly approaching certain death, I push over the limits of my body and move it.

I succeeded in moving on the spur of the moment. Even with the jolts of sharp pain and hums of dull pain running their course, somehow, miraculously. With the momentum of having leapt up, I shake off the pain and run— when, she caught up.

**“MOaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”**

With that exclamation, and having been hugged, tackled from the front, my own scream is erased. Despite her soft, white skin, her beefy, log-like arms grab onto my slender body, putting me in a tight hold which could almost break me.

I'm caught. Ow. It hurts. As those sensations floated to mind, I was again pushed down onto the bloody stone floor.

Futaba-san had leapt at me with all her might. With my less than 50 kilos110 pounds, I had no means to weaken her momentum as she crashed in. Goes



without saying but, no way was I capable of lifting it either.

The shock from falling runs sharply across my back, but that soon becomes a minor issue. Above me right now, lay a weight of the 100 kg class. This bulk, this pressure, I wouldn't go wrong deeming it a new form of torture.

"Ka... Ha, ah..."

A feeling as if all the air in my lungs was instantly driven out. I forget to breathe for a moment.

But luckily, my head at least was given the grace of avoiding Futaba-san's enshrouding. Similar to where a parent is holding up a child, which I guess happened because we'd fallen over.

If that warm, soft, yet immensely heavy mass of sensuality I feel downwards from my neck were to reach all the way to my face, I'd surely have lost consciousness from oxygen deficiency long ago. I do *not* have a masochism great enough to want to literally drown in a sea of flesh.

"Fu, haAAaa... Fu, taba-san! S-top!"

Breathing with more intensity than I've ever did in my life, I shout out to the maximum of my potential.

Even if this Futaba-san has somehow lost sanity, reason, composure, soundness of thought, and all the other important stuff, if I can just remind her that I'm a friendly then surely—

**"BuaAAAAAAAAA!"**

As if she was making fun of my convenient plans, no, as if she was using every fibre of her being to absolutely deny them, Futaba-san only answers me in the same manner as a beast.

I was bit. She bit down on me. Sharp pain runs along my neck. And then I felt, as if the starving beast had found satisfaction in its meat, the raw warmth, the lick of her tongue.

My spine was literally in jitters. And, I don't know how many times it's been today, but surely this one would be the loudest, I screamed.

**"GyaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"**

Ah, it's over, I'm dead. I'm totally done for. I'll be killed. Just when I thought I was saved, just when I thought, she'd saved me.

This isn't funny. Yes, I could be eaten by Monsters, and yes, I could also be murdered by other students based on their own self-interest, but what is up with getting killed by an ally gone mental!

It's way too unfair, way too hateful. A resentment, like dense black smoke, it rises from the very depths of my being; and I voice it.

"A-AaAAAAA... Pl-aA-Plu.... Pl-unge into permanent—"

I wonder what meaning is there in using that.

"Swelter, and..."

I'm probably not resentful of Futaba-san at all.

"Curse—"

Even without meaning, even without hate, still, I had to say it.

"The bodyyyyy!"

My last ounce of resistance. My foremost Curse.

"Red, FeveEEEEEEEEERRRR!"

A scream that could tear apart my vocal cords, in the end, simply echoes into the empty, blood-soaked passage.

Inducing a light fever. No way would this very symbol of the lameness of the Vocation known as Shaman be able to stop a Futaba-san holding enough power to subjugate hordes of Goma.

That being said, the other Curses would be just as useless in this unsurmountable crisis. 'Blackhair Bind' wouldn't be able to restrain her, and my most reliable counter, 'Pain Return', for this current Mad Futaba-san who seems to be ignoring all sense of pain, would prove equally useless. Presently, there lay a mark on her white neck, the same spot as where she bit me, but she doesn't seem to be minding that at all.

So now, the only thing I can do is use my fleeting strength to pitifully groan and struggle in her arms.

But if I think about it, rather than being tortured to death by Goma, dying in the embrace of a girl could be quite the bless—

“...Ah”

And, as I was engaging in witless musings in a state of fading conscience, I suddenly realized.

“Ah, huh... Futaba, –san?”

Stopped. She stopped moving.

“Huh, eh, no way... No, seriously...”

Faint breathing reaches my ears. And, the pressure on my body is still the same— but, that power akin to a rampaging, mad bull is all but gone, and she simply lay limp. Her body hugging mine feels somewhat warm.

“S-she’s, stopped...”

As I nervously peek at Futaba-san’s face, it didn’t have that expression of anger from the four corners of hell anymore. Her glowing eyes, her eyelids are sealed shut. The crease above her nose gone without a trace, her brows displayed calm. A face sleeping in serenity.

Why, how come Futaba-san’s rampage abruptly came to a halt? How it came to be in the first place is also unknown. Suddenly calming back down is even further indecipherable.

But right now, that doesn’t matter a zilch. The reason, the cause, the form of karma binding her, thinking about all that, I can put off for later.

“Ha, haha... awesome... I was saved...”

Seems, the gears of my fate, will be turning a while longer.

[1]Clothesline is another wrestling move. I’m not too knowledgeable about the sport so this is the best I can do~

[3] Indians probably don’t infer to the ones who go *Namaste* but the ones with the feathers... well I guess Indigenous Americans would be the cool term?

## Chapter 22: Courage and Madness

I wonder, what am I even doing?

“WaAAAAAA!”

I’m running through the dungeon passages raising my pathetic yells. Swaying my heavy body.

“GueRaaa!”

From behind, I can hear the vulgar cries of Goma.

And right now I’m running away. By myself. Leaving behind my life saviour, my only ally, that small, sweet classmate of mine; leaving behind Momokawa Kotarou.

“Haa... Haa... aa...”

I have to help. I can still make it. I need to go back to help right now— Even if I keep thinking that over and over, my body refuses to act. Forget stopping, my legs only accelerate. Trying to gain distance, even the tiniest bit faster, I run for my life.

I’m the worst. Repaying my debt with a stab in the back. I, as a human being, am the absolute worst.

Deserting Momokawa-kun, not acting the least bit to go help, running away as fast as I possibly can... The me who kept running even now, she was a pile of unsalvageable trash.

My chest is bursting in worry for him. My heart is crushed in self-loathing. The endless stream of tears escaping from my eyes isn’t only from fear.

Yet, my body gives priority only to its own survival instinct. My reasoning mind looking back at my actions seemed to be clearly cut off from my instincts driving my body forward.

What ruled over the faculties controlling my body, was simply and only, pure terror.

That my pathetic will would be unable to overcome this foreboding... was a fact made painfully obvious from my experiences up to now.

That's right. In the end, I was only a wimpy pig. Kisaragi-san, Natsukawa-san, Satou-san, them abandoning me was only natural. Even the kind Momokawa-kun is undoubtedly resenting me for one-sidedly deserting him.

Aah, maybe as a Shaman, Momokawa-kun can curse this deplorable me. If so, I'd prefer he curse me to death. If I were to be stabbed by Goma anyway, I'd much rather die receiving retribution from his curse.

"—Ah!?"

My conscience swimming in a torrent of guilt, is brought back to reality. For an instant, my body underwent a floating sensation. And right after, came a shock.

"A... ouch!"

I had stumbled on something, and thunderously fell down. Was it a stone, some rubble, or perhaps tree roots that tripped my legs. I don't know, but neither do I care.

At any rate, right here, my escaping had come to a stop.

"...Hii!?"

Behind me was a bend in the passage. And from beyond there, I echoed the Gomas' grunts. Very soon would I hear even their savage exhalations.

"A-aah... No..."

Will I be dying here?

*No. I don't wanna die.* Loudly screamed the ugly instincts that made me run all the way here.

And, even thinking reasonably, I didn't want to die. That's what I had answered. That I didn't want to die yet, when Momokawa-kun had asked.

Don't wanna die, I don't want to die. But my real wish— I want to help.

I, wanted to help Momokawa-kun. I wanted to become his strength. I still haven't, repaid him the slightest bit.

Having him heal the wound in my stomach, having him take me as an ally. Not having the courage to finish off the Red Dog, shamefully getting him to do it with me when stabbing that bait Goma.

What Knight. I'm always, I'm only being protected. Only being, given to.

But, no matter how much I regret, not matter how much I look back on what ifs, I can't make myself take real action. When the time comes, I don't act.

I lack courage.

A bit, I need just a tiny bit. Just enough to still, when I cower in fear. Just enough to halt, when I scramble to run.

I want it. I want courage.

If I only had that, I could—

“...A”

It appeared in my teary, blurry field-of-vision.

My right hand. I was, holding something there. A dirty, brown pelt bag. White powder tumbling from within. Half having dropped onto the passage, and the other half, smeared onto my hand and arm.

It must've gotten out when I fell. This, Goma's narcotic.

“Kay, let's see here... when ingested, it uplifts the spirit and eases fatigue, you get into a state of extreme high, and furthermore, has a strong addiction factor— wait, this *is* a drug!”

*Bleck!* went Momokawa-kun's expression, it was pretty cute. Wait no, not that; right, with his Shaman powers, he was deciphering the attributes of this drug.

Usage was per inhalation. Effects: uplifting the mind, and alleviating weariness. Additionally, causing great excitement.

“Hey, Momokawa-kun... If I used this, could I...”

Drugs, bad, don't. Words like that come to mind.

However, for me at this moment, the laws and ethics of Japan stand for zero use. They won't stand, for the tiniest use. Because right now, I'm in a dungeon.

A do-or-die survival, one where there's even the possibility of fellow classmates killing each other; a phantasmal scenario.

“Even I, become strong...”

Thinking like that, there's no need to hesitate.

This narcotic, this devil's white powder covering my hand, it'd only take a whiff. Even I could do something that trivial.

“Momokawa-kun, please give me... courage...”

With a fierce prayer, I put my hand to my mouth and— “—  
ooOOO**OOOO**AAA

Eh, what, what's this, it's great. Great, it's amazing!

Mo-moving, my body's moving. Welling up, power. From the pit of my stomach, from the depths of my chest. Overflowing, ohh, it's coming, rising. Power all over my body, feels as if it's exploding!

**“O, AaAAA!”**

My body's light. Rising. soaring. Like a feather dancing in the wind, my body feels exceedingly nimble.

I turn. With just that basic act, I feel like I've burst off. Can't control, this power. I can't settle myself.

“BugE!Ge, GuEAA!”

It jumps out in front of me, this black, black, person shaped, ahh, what was it, who was it, this thing.

It's bright. Was it, always this bright? See, I can see, better than just before, vividly, my eyes are crystal clear.

So I saw it. The black thing coming at me. What's that its hand? That shiny thing. Dangerous, that's sharp, and dangerous.

**“Haa... Fuu!”**

If a fly got close, you'd brush it away right? Even if it didn't touch you, just by reflex. Go away, shoo.

It's the same. But, it's different. It touched. Just slightly, on my palm, it touched.

“BuGE—”

*Plop*, like a water-balloon, it blew off. Fragile, fleeting. The black thing, isn't there anymore. All that remains, is the dark red that coils my hand. Disgust, I don't feel it. I mean, I'm used to blood. It's unavoidable in cooking. Even this raw stench.

But, one must be quick to wash it off. Huh, where was the sink again?

“GaBURA!? GuENZEra”

Not giving me the time to wash, the black ones keep coming. Passage-fulls of them. Plap-plap, pitter-patter, quiet, shut up. The heck, are these— “**Aa... Bu-UaAAAAA...**”

Ah, I remember. Goma, these are Goma. Momokawa-kun called them that. Momokawa-kun said that, we'd kill the Goma.

“**Go-maa... kill, gilll...**”

Momokawa-kun said it, so we gotta do it. I have to do it. I must, do it for him.

“**GoaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!**”

Beat, beat. I'll beat, and beat, and crush. Do it, right now, I can do it, quite easily. Compared to kneading Hamburg steak, it's child's play.

The passage went red. When it did, the Goma were gone.

Ahaha, did it, I did it Momokawa-kun.

“**Mo, Momo, kaa... -ku...**”

Where. Hey, Momokawa-kun, where, where are you? I, did it see? The first time, I did it see, just like you said, Momokawa-kun.

Since I did it, now you'll be happy right? You'll laugh right? Momokawa-kun, I'm not, troubling you right?

So, you won't abandon me right? You'll be with me right?

But why Momokawa-kun, why aren't you here?



**“A-ah... AaAA—”**

I have to look for him. I have to find him.

Ah, yeah, that’s wrong. That said it wrong. Why, did I forget I wonder.  
Something that important.

I remembered. Momokawa-kun, I have to **help** him.

**“Fu, haa—”**

Run run. I run, and run. Breathing doesn’t stammer. It isn’t painful. Full power, non stop, I can run. Right now I can run so, so fast.

Maybe that’s why, yup, that is why, I quickly found him.

**“Sto...sta...aa...”**

Momokawa-kun, was crying. In tatters, groveling on the floor.

Hey, why, how come you’re crying? How come you look so pained, so sad, so lonely.

**“GuGue!”**

The Goma, it kicked Momokawa-kun.

Seeing, watching that, watching his face crying, writhing in agony, watching that, having seen that, couldn’t, I couldn’t think anymore. My vision, my head, all dyed in red, red, blood red.

Slaughter.

**“ooOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA**

Die, die, diediediedie. Everyone die, everything die. Everything that made Momokawa-kun cry will die. Kill, kill, I will KILL. One, two, three, everyone, everybody, everything, all of them, slaughter.

**“—GoaAAAAAAAAAA!”**

Die, die, kill killed. Completely, every black I saw, I changed to red.

Where, where are they. The ones making Momokawa-kun cry, making him suffer. I won’t forgive them, I’ll never forgive them. Making Momokawa-kun, my Momokawa-kun— **“Fu, fuh!”**

At some point, every one was gone. Someone had, made them all red and scattered them on the floor.

Ah, thank goodness. With that, there's no one left who'd do mean things to Momokawa-kun. All of them died. All, I'd killed them all.

**"Fuu...u, Aah... Mo, Momoka... -ku..."**

"F-Futaba... -san..."

Huh, Momokawa-kun, he's still crying. Still, shaking. What's the matter, scared? Of what? Of whom?

It's okay, it's okay—

"Momo, kaWa, -kun"

It's all okay now Momokawa-kun. I'm here, I'm here you know. It's only me here.

"So it's fine right, I can comfort you right?"

**"Mo, Momo... Ka, aAa..."**

"Hii!?"

He's frightened. Poor Momokawa-kun, he's so sweet. I want to comfort him, hold him. I don't want to talk— I just, **want** him.

**"Mo, AaaAAA!"**

"UwaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Caught you! Yay, ahh, wow, small, you're so little, Momokawa-kun. Take off my hands, I could lose him. Take away my eyes, and the same.

But, it's okay. I'll never, ever let you go. I won't run anymore. So you too Momokawa-kun, don't run away. Together forever, *gyuu!squeeze*

"Fu, haAAaa... Fu, taba-san! S-top!"

Ah, I see it. Just now, I saw it. From the collar of his gakuran, Momokawa-kun's white neck. So slender, so ephemeral, ahh, so, so yummy.

**"BuaAAAAAAAAA!"**

Yummy. You're delicious, Momokawa-kun. I've never eaten anything so

scrumptious in my whole life. Momokawa-kun's flavor.

"GyaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

More, I need more. The first bite was amazing, that first bite, it starves me for more.

Not enough, more, give me more.

All of Momokawa-kun, give it to me.

"Red, FeveEEEEEEEEERRRR!"

... Me... Your... Everything...

*"You want it, then grasp it with your own power"*

At the edge of my dimming consciousness, I heard a voice.

*"Futaba Meiko, from now, your Vocation will be—"*

I wonder who. Definitely isn't Momokawa-kun. His voice is cute too, but not like a sensual woman's tone.

And around there, I lost conscience.

*"—Berserker"*

## Chapter 23: Shaman and Berserker

“—Morning, Futaba-san”

Waking up, felt strangely refreshing. With vivid awareness, and a clear mind, I snap open my eyes to find Momokawa-kun’s sweet, stray-cat-like face.

Half dazed in fascination at his gentle smile, I try to return the greeting—when, it all comes back.

*what’s this, it’s great— Power all over my body— Disgust— beat— Momokawa-kun, where— Slaughter*

Flashback. A rather suitable word to use for me who has used a narcotic.

*want— yummy— give me more— All of Momokawa-kun, give it to me*

It came back. Or rather, I just remembered. It’s something that happened only a few moments ago, obviously I wouldn’t forget.

Yes, those things I did, to Momokawa-kun. All of them.

“A-ah... Momokawa-kun... Umm, I...”

“It’s ok, Futaba-san, just relax”

It’s not ok. The things I did to Momokawa-kun, they’re not ok at all, they’re not things where you just say *sorry* and move on. *Relax*, I can’t relax at all.

“We’re at a Fairy Square, it’s safe. Also, the drug’s symptoms are all gone by now. Futaba-san, that Goma’s narcotic, you used it right? Remember anything?”

Wow. Still amazing as ever, Momokawa-kun. You got it on the dot.

So there’s no reason to hide it. I made a slight nod. Voice wasn’t coming out well.

“Thanks to Blessed Body, the addiction factors and after-effects are all gone, or at least, supposed to be... how do you feel?”

“Y-yeah... I’m alright...”

“I see, don’t force yourself ok, I think you should rest a bit longer”

Adhering to those words, I stop planning to rise up, and choose to stay laid down.

*I’m alright*, isn’t something I answered acting tough. I really don’t feel any problems at all. No sign of fever, sluggishness, or even pain. In fact, it’s more like all my fatigue is gone, and I’ve recovered right as rain.

But I wasn’t feeling lively enough to jump up and start the day’s adventure right away. That being said, I didn’t feel like going back to sleep either.

So deciding I’d talk to Momokawa-kun, I raise only my upper body. Things I want to hear, things I want to say, there’s a ton. Including things I have to say no matter what.

“Hey, Momokawa-kun... Um, so what happened, after that?”

What I asked first, would be a valid question given the situation. Yet, the real question I should’ve asked, I should’ve wanted to hear the answer to, I couldn’t get it out.

This time, it wasn’t a lack of courage. I simply avoided it. Once again, I had run away.

“I think you should know, Futaba-san, after you fainted, it’s been a while. Hmm, around half a day maybe?”

Seems I slept a lot more than I thought. Momokawa-kun, I wonder if he’s properly rested too... No, he wasn’t the type to only rest.

In the time I slept, he finished readying everything he could, and even had the time to make guesses about that frenzy. That’s why he’s been able to talk with me so calmly. Even though I did those horrible, horrible things.

“This fairy square, I found it only a little ways away from that T-junction. Real good luck there... or rather, these Squares seem to be well spaced so I thought it’d be closer than going back to the last one”

I’m ashamed of not even starting to think about that until now. Now that he’s said it, it’s true that before meeting Momokawa-kun, there were fairy squares at a fair frequency.

“It really is like a save point. Well, maybe that’s why they call it a dungeon”

Meaning, it’s like a game world, is what he wants to say I guess. I have heard the term RPG before, but any further than that is a mystery. But Natsukawa-san did say something like that too, so it must be pretty similar.

“B-but, Momokawa-kun... umm, how did you move me here?”

That was the greatest mystery. Personally, it’s something I’d wanted to avoid hearing... But asking this at present was of utmost importance.

“But of course, in a princess carry. I *am* a man after all<sup>[1]</sup>”

“Eeeeehh!? Really!? That’s amazing, Momokawa-kun!”

“... Sorry, I lied”

“Eh, ah... Yeah, that... that’s about right...”

Damn, I went and flew off to my own personal la la land. He probably thinks I’m just a dumb girl now... mmm, I guess not. That was definitely just a joke. Momokawa-kun has a super wry smile, and is looking away all the way to the day after tomorrow. The cold sweat descending his cheek, that kind of expression of his is again, quite lovely.

“But then... how did you?”

“I put you on a stretcher, and dragged it along”

*Look, that one*, he said pointing, and looking there, there were two poles with dark, dirty, shabby-looking cloths wrung about; it looked only like a large article of trash, and was disposed of beside the fountain.

Next to that, I saw an assortment of other weird dirty looking things dumped at the spot.

“In the P.E. textbook, there’s a part about making an improvised stretcher with 2 poles and a T-shirt, remember? There were the Gomas’ clothes and spears lying about, so material wasn’t a problem”

“W-wow, Momokawa-kun... you even went, and did that...”

“Well, it was risky business. The Goma could’ve come back with friends, and other Monsters could’ve happened by too”

Normally, you'd want to get away from there as quick as you can. More so, when your ally just went crazy and attacked you, you'd naturally leave them and go. No, even if you did want to take them, who'd want to carry a fatty like me anyway.

"But I had to do it. If I ran away alone, my future would instantly go bleak. So I made the stretcher, and since there was the chance, I scavenged off any gear I could off the Goma."

Me being of such immense weight, he undoubtedly couldn't bring much else. Sorry, if only I weighed more like a normal girl...

"And well, it's that... won't abandon you, did promise right"

Looking at his slightly shy, bashful face I— want— thought that, just my imagination. I mean, that terrible drug's effects, they're already gone. Having returned to sanity, I wouldn't think it, I wouldn't wish it.

It's okay, it's okay... As Momokawa-kun's ally, I won't rampage like that ever again. I won't hold those twisted desires either.

Still, even when I'm thinking that, entirely unable to ease the beating in my chest, I instantly look, and also face, away. My cheeks are tingling, and I'm definitely making a weird face right now... I just can't let him see that.

"W-well, but I was p-pretty heavy right! Sorry!"

I shout to try and distract him. It was hard to say, but the other thing is even harder, so I said it.

"No, well, I mean... it was heavy... but I somehow managed"

"B-but... It's not something you can somehow manage you know... my weight..."

I feel like crying even though I said it myself. Nevertheless, what I said was indeed true.

And would Momokawa-kun really be able to drag me, whose more than twice as heavy as himself, on a stretcher, while also carrying spoils from the Goma in another hand? No, no way he could.

"Also, Momokawa-kun, you were pretty banged up too! You're alright, right?"

“I wasn’t really alright, but it’s true I somehow managed. For my lacking strength, I used power seeds, and as for the fear and pain... the drug I guess”

“Eh... M-Momokawa-kun, you don’t mean...”

“I used it too, the Goma’s narcotic. Of course, I didn’t inhale a whole lot like you did, and I neutralized it a bit with the blue flower antidote. So I only got high and forgot the pain.<sup>[2]</sup>”

Which means he then used his strength in a forcefully induced manic state to carry me all the way here.

“The moment I found this place and jumped inside, I collapsed after letting out some puke and blood. Almost fainted then and there, but I managed to will myself into eating atleast some fairy walnuts. It’s cause I used way too many power seeds, so if I didn’t get some nutrition in, I probably wouldn’t have woken up again.”

*Ha ha ha*, he bizarrely laughed, as Momokawa-kun recounted his grand experience.

“... Sorry”

*I beat the Goma, and saved Momokawa-kun.* I’m stupid for just thinking that. In the end, it was me who got saved yet again. Forget repaying my debt, I’m making more problems... and at that, disastrous problems that put him at the edge of life and death.

“Momokawa-kun... I’m sorry...”

But truthfully, there was something else I had to apologize for.

“Why are you apologizing, Futaba-san?”

It’s obvious. The primary cause was me going crazy and assaulting Momokawa-kun, it’s about that. The utter guilt of having done that— No, not that. It’s not guilt.

What I was really afraid of, was if, if he’d abandon me.

That’s why only these words of apology well up from deep in my chest. That’s why these words of apology don’t have a smidgen of sincerity to them.



“I, remember... those things I did after using the drug, I remember everything”

Tears were already falling as I said that. No, stop that. If I cry here, it’s like I’m begging for sympathy. *It couldn’t be helped. It’s not your fault.* It’s like I only want those words.

And above all, Momokawa-kun won’t blame me for my actions. He won’t resent me. I could only apologize like that because I was sure, from our conversation until now, I had made sure of that. I made an unbelievably atrocious, calculated move.

“Eh, Ah... it’s like that... I’d have thought with that kind of crazy state, you’d conveniently forget everything but, yeah, I see, so it’s not like that”

Yet Momokawa-kun practically showed neither anger nor hatred, it was more like a blank face. As I thought, he didn’t blame me.

But, it’s not that he wasn’t scared. It’s not that he wasn’t hurt, it’s not that it wasn’t, painful. I mean look, there on Momokawa-kun’s neck, there’s a big, painful-looking scab formed.

That was unmistakably, a remnant of the wound I marked on him in my lust.

“But I was almost done for there. If Futaba-san hadn’t come along, I’d definitely have died there. Thanks, for saving me”

“But I... I ran away! Leaving you behind Momokawa-kun, I ran away alone!”

“You came back so it’s pretty much alright”

“Still! I hurt you! I remember, I remember biting down on your neck... I, if I stayed like that, I would’ve, would’ve—”

“It was close, but the frenzy stopped. Don’t worry about it too much”

“But, but... I...”

“We both survived, so it’s fine. Yeah, I’m glad I teamed up with you. Let’s keep getting along”

I was waiting for those words. I am, the worst.

Frenzy. That’s what Momokawa-kun said. Because of that drug, I lost myself,

unable to distinguish friend from foe, I rampaged. Momokawa-kun probably thinks that to be true, and is satisfied with that.

And I'm also thinking that's the case, so in the end, I'd adamantly indulge in Momokawa-kun's kind words. I can still stay together with Momokawa-kun. I'd end up believing that.

It's the 2<sup>nd</sup> time I'm relying on his good will. The kind Momokawa-kun would accept a 3<sup>rd</sup> time too, I'd end up thinking.

But I know, even this stupid me knows, that as a person, you shouldn't expect this kind of thing in the first place. This time, I must become useful to Momokawa-kun. I must, protect him.

"Momokawa-kun, you know I, I won't be scared anymore, and I'll fight. Because I—"

Courage, I've already received. From Momokawa-kun, from God, both of them.

"—I've become a berserker"

"...Eh?"

[1] Princess carry... if you didn't know, please add it to your list of jargon never to forget~

[2] These blue flowers are from chapter 6, the one that looks like lavenders.

# Chapter 24: Gathering Friends

“... So, Satou-san is really”

I got a breakdown of their current circumstances from the Class Rep. In a fight where a troop of Goma had brought along Red Dogs as their hunting dogs, the girl named Satou died. Her vocation was Archer, and during the fight she was acting as support in the rear. But with the combination of Goma and Red Dog and with such large numbers to boot, got surrounded, and their backs were open.

Class Rep and Natsukawa-san tried to go help, but their hands were already full dealing with enemies of their own. The fight dragged on until around half the Monsters were defeated, at which point, they seemed to retreat as if sensing their enemy was too much. And along with their retreat, the Goma undoubtedly took along the Archer girl as their spoils.

The other two in tatters, they somehow managed to keep walking until they reached the current Fairy Square, would be the story.

“I, I... thought, it was all over... but then, Souma-kun and Sakura-chan, came along and, I’m just so glad, we can still survive... Uuuu!”

“There there, it’s alright Minami. With four of us here, we can definitely, get through this”

Natsukawa-san was gushing in tears once again, it was painful to watch. For now, it’s better to leave her consoling and calming-down to Sakura.

“I thought, I was ready for this... but hearing about deaths, really stings dammit”

“There’s likely been many more, not just Satou-san”

Seeing Class Rep’s heavy sigh, *There’s no way*, is what I didn’t say irresponsibly.

“And actually, right before Satou-san, Futaba-san was also, you know...”

“What, why!?”

“She, she wasn’t suited to fighting. And after getting cut by Goma we had no way of healing her, and”

What the hell, dammit. At that time, if only Sakura was there... we could’ve, we would’ve saved her. We could’ve prevented the Class Rep from having to make the cruel decision of leaving wounded friends to die.

“Shi-... I won’t say it was a good decision. But with these things going on, we need to get everyone together all the faster. I don’t want anyone else, dying so helplessly”

“Everyone huh... Yuuto-kun, only three can escape, that info has reached you right?”

To Class Rep whose face took on another layer of cloudiness as she asked, I slightly nod, affirming her query.

I think it was when we got to our third Fairy Square. The divine gate at the very depths of the dungeon, and the cores needed for its function. And that wretched limit of 3 who can enter that gate. That memo had already found its way to me.<sup>[1]</sup>

“There could be people who’ll attack us you know”

“You’re, probably right”

“Even ones who could betray at the last minute”

“Yeah, doesn’t sound impossible”

“So you’re saying, you’ll still be gathering them?”

Everyone wants to survive. And no one wants to die. Even by stabbing others in the back, even if it’s just them, they’ll live on using any means— people who think like that, exist too. And I’d bet, a majority of us think like that. As a human, it’s their natural survival instinct.

“Class Rep, we’ve got 4 of us here”

“... Yes, you’re right”

“I don’t, want to abandon anyone. Sakura, you, Natsukawa-san. If you asked me to cast one away, I can’t do it. Also, if you ask me to sacrifice myself for the

3 of you, I won't do that either"

"*Fufu*, quite selfish aren't we. Or should I say privileged?"

"May seem that way in this situation. But I'll be taking that selfishness, and make it real, no matter what. I won't abandon a single one. Everyone that's still alive, I'll have them all get back to Earth!"

I'm not giving up. More so when there's already been deaths. My resolve just solidified even more.

That's right, I wanted to overturn this unreasonable scenario, that's why I wished for power. That's what the hero's for.

"*Sigh*... Sorry, forgive me Yuuto-kun. I was, only being pessimistic there... In the beginning, I too, truly, faithfully, wanted to believe that"

No, don't worry about it Class Rep. You can't help but get depressed in this place

After losing 2 people back to back, even the ever calm and intelligent Class Rep would be at her limit. All the more when before we came along, they'd just recently lost Satou-san and were down to two. Their own lives were in a precarious situation.

Keeping calm through all that, just isn't possible.

"Monsters are strong, but with everyone with their vocations gathered, we can surely resist. With all of us here, maybe we could even find a way for everyone to use the divine gate, and in the worst case, we can just get out on foot"

At the very least, this world has a human inhabited kingdom. There's no way it's the case that we'd walk around the whole planet, only to discover that it was full of savage lands without the presence of mankind. Keep walking, and we'll eventually land on some human habitation.

"When Yuuto-kun says it, it sounds you can even do the impossible"

"We got our vocations right, I think we can do a lot"

Not just my combat-only powers, there could be someone specialized for survival too. If we can get someone like that, our ability to cope would become

much higher than trying out stuff ourselves.

“Well, we’ll manage. And one of these days, we should meet up with Ryuuichi too”

“Ho-hold it right there, where did his name come from!”

I mean, if it doesn’t come up now, when will it, is the feeling.

“Geez, laughing at me? How rude”

“Ahaha, sorry, my bad. Well, I was thinking it’d be great to get him soon too. That guy’s pretty much the only one I can leave my back to in all those fights”

“*Sigh*, It’s not like you don’t get into a fair bit of trouble yourself, I hear”

“Truly unfortunate, I happen to be a victim myself”

“I wonder about that”

Seems like my character is in jeopardy of being dubbed a battle-maniac, but yeah, I’m glad that Class Rep’s a bit more lively now.

“By the way, what sort of vocation do you have Yuuto-kun? Looks like it wasn’t too hard for you getting here, is it perhaps quite strong?”

“Ahh, my vocation— right, uhm, don’t laugh ok?”

*Rest assured*, she affirms in a cool smile. Alright, I’ll be taking your word for it then.

“... My vocation, it’s Hero”

“Ahahaha! He’s really a Hero!”

“C, Class Rep you liaaaaarrr!”

After the 4 of us had regrouped, following a bit of rest, we head back into the dungeon with the purpose of finding the other students. Though I say find, for the time being, we’re only following where the Magic Compass points. The others should be advancing according to this too, so we’re bound to meet up at some point.

“I guess, they aren’t wasting time... Natsukawa-san, are you all set?”

“Yep, no prob! Souma-kun’s fighting beside me now so it’s super reassuring”

We were walking along a wide path, and raising moans from in front of us, came a flock of Zombies. That being the case, Natsukawa-san was in her usual bright and cheerful self, and readied her weapon. A knife in her right hand, and a kitchen knife in her left. The former was taken from a Goma, and the latter seems to be inherited from Futaba-san.

Her having the ability to attack head on, she had alone played the part of vanguard. I don't care what vocation there is, a single girl having to battle Monsters all by herself is seriously harsh.

*I'll protect her*, is not something I have enough strength to claim at this time. I can't win, I can't protect them with just me. So right now, please lend me strength everyone.

"Leave your back to me Natsukawa-san, I'll definitely protect it"

"Nihaha, t-thanks, Souma-kun..."

She's blushing, and avoiding my gaze for some reason, but it looks like a happy shyness, so I'll take it as her coming to trust me a little. With a reliable comrade, you can relax your heart more, and function more calmly, and less recklessly.

Great, now I just have to perform well, and let Natsukawa-san feel she can rely on me, let's do that.

"Nii-san, Minami, I'll put on the Enchants now"

"Mm, Yeah, appreciate it"

With Sakura's Holy Enchant cast on my sword and Natsukawa-san's knives, we're all set for combat. But that Sakura, why's her mood so bad? Her tone felt a smidge thorny.

"So yeah, Ryouko-chan, leaving cover to you! Souma-kun, let's go!"

"Yeah!"

Blades, glowing with holy brilliance, in hand, Natsukawa-san and I both gained speed with high walk, and dove into the mass of Zombies.

"Geez, nii-san and Minami, too reckless the both of you!"

Having triumphantly returned with Natsukawa-san after eliminating the Zombies, we had gotten Sakura mad.

“S-sorry Sakura-chan. But but, Souma-kun was with me, and I could fight really cozily? And it got a bit fun I guess?”

“Ah well, I guess I went a bit carried away, sorry about that”

Seeing Natsukawa-san’s fighting ability first hand, I ended up getting a bit excited myself. There’s no way you can find a girl who can fight and move so nimbly in our original world. But witnessing that power, the current me was so overjoyed, and being able to fight shoulder to shoulder with that was so much fun— well, I guess if you selfishly go wild like that, of course she’d be mad.

“Isn’t it fine Sakura? Look, they did so well, the two of us didn’t need to lift a finger. Souma-kun’s terribly strong, so Minami can go fight without a worry”

“Yeah, I’ll protect Natsukawa-san with my life if I have to”

“Niha! T-that’s, Souma-kun, I...”

“There’s no point if you get hurt nii-san!”

“No problem, at that time, can’t you just heal me Sakura?”

“Seriously! That’s not the—”

I thought I said something pretty obvious, but as if I just poured more oil into the fire, Sakura became increasingly furious. Good grief, guys are obviously supposed to protect girls. What’s she getting so mad for.

“But we have to practice our teamwork, so go a bit easier on the tension next time”

After a bunch lecturing from Sakura, we decided to adopt the Class Rep’s plan, and resumed our trek through the dungeon.

Until now, with only Sakura and me, we could take care of small scale packs of monsters. Now, with a swift, close-quarters fighter, the Thief, Natsukawa-san, and wielding a range of offensive and defensive Ice Magics, the Ice Mage, Class Rep, joining us, our fighting potential doubled, no, it likely rose a lot more.

To be honest, I don’t feel we’ll lose no matter how many Zombies or Red Dogs



get thrown at us.

“—Nii-san!”

“I’m fine on my end! you three get the other one!”

Having arrived at a particularly large Forested Dome, we were attacked by a large pack of Red Dogs. The one leading the pack was a large sized Boss Dog I’d seen for the first time. Two of them at that. Maybe they’re a male and female couple. The two of them weren’t leading their own individual packs, but worked together splendidly, and came at us with tactics and teamwork you’d never expect from simple dogs.

If it was just me and Sakura, we’d be taking on quite a bit of risk with these numbers... but now we had reliable comrades. So it doesn’t feel like we’ll lose at all.

“Tri Slash!”

My 3-hit combo slash was agilely dodged by the Boss Dog and only cut the air. As if saying, *I can see right through you*, the Monster grinned crookedly— A simple dog in the end, I guess. Since it fell for such an obvious faint.

“—Got’cha!”

I sharply throw a knife. Since I had launched Tri Slash with only my right hand, my left was free. And there, I used Force Boost to shoot a knife, so even the bulky skin of the Boss was deeply pierced.

“Gyau!”

Its side hit dead-on, the Boss raises a pained cry. And the opening created, proved all too fatal.

I closed the distance, and before it could regain its stance, I dropped the Boss Dog’s head with Slash.

“You did it, Yuuto-kun”

“Yeah, good job on your end too”

As I had ended the Boss Dog, the three of them seemed to have also defeated the one on their end. Well, with Sakura and Class Rep’s concentrated Ice and

Light, along with Natsukawa-san’s knife talents, something like a Boss Dog won’t even last half a minute.

At the point where the pack whittled down enough to allow us to approach the Bosses, the match was already over. With both their Bosses done in, the ones remaining quickly fled.

“...Mm, this is”

When I went to collect the cores from the bosses, like with the Armor Bear, they turned to grains of light and vanished.

Acquired Skill	
Ignis ProtectionFire Resistance	Decreases damage received from the Fire attribute

A mechanical message floated into my mind.

I see, so this turning into light and disappearing is a sign that I’m receiving Acquired Skills. Since the glowing particles look like they’re being sucked into my body, it could be that the powers from Monsters are being absorbed with magic.

At any rate, it’s easy to understand. Plus, this disappearing and only leaving the core made for easy collection and was quite convenient.

Like that, our dungeon capture has been proceeding swimmingly. Plentiful battle potential, and reliable friends. Piling on experience, me and everyone else unlock more powers from our vocations and continue to grow stronger.

However, I had yet to witness the true menace of the dungeon. Even though I’d been once broken by the Armor Bear, with so much positive progress, I started to forget how were confronting death in the truest sense of the word.

And the event that made even this foolish me jut open my eyes, happened when we reached a big, the biggest stone-built area I’ve seen yet.

“—KyaAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

A scream, like the tearing of silk, echoes. There’s a fellow classmate there being attacked, we could tell without anyone saying a thing.

We dash full speed into the room where the scream came from. Please, make it—

“Out of my wayyyyy!”

There, we found a horde of Goma, the largest one I’ve ever encountered. With their same dirty figures, crude weapons, these black, goblin-like demons of gluttony. But their numbers don’t even phase our current strength.

I cut into the horde without hesitation. Natsukawa-san was right behind, and cover fire came flying from Sakura and Class Rep. Stepping over the slain corpses of Goma, we cut open the path, and made it to the center of their siege in no time.

And there we saw—

“Ah, Souma-kun!? It’s Souma-kuuun!”

“What, Souma!”

Two familiar girls. One, a frail girl smaller than even Natsukawa-san, who gave the impression of a small animal you’d want to protect. The other, valiantly dual-wielding a rusted pair of long and short swords, an imposing girl with a long ponytail being something like her defining appearance.

Both my classmates. And both, my friends.

Takanashi-san and, Asuna!

Thank god, as far as I see, both of them still look fine. The smaller one is Takanashi Kotori. The one with the swords, Kenzaki Asuna.<sup>[2]</sup>

Maybe Takanashi-san lost her weapon, as she was just standing there shivering. As for Asuna, she stood in front as if protecting her.

“We’re saved! Souma, and looks like there’s others too”

“Yeah, we got Sakura and Class Rep with us”

“I’m here too!”

“Aah! Minami-chan!”

Arriving slightly later, Natsukawa-san went and stood mirrored to Asuna covering Takanashi-san from the other side. With this, we have me and Asuna in front, and Natsukawa-san in the rear, all protecting Takanashi-san. I’m scared to think what would’ve happened if we were only a step late.

“Asuna, anyway for now, we’ll be cleaning up this horde”

“No, the horde isn’t much of an issue. Souma, don’t panic, but look over there...”

Cold sweat dripping down her cheek, I follow Asuna’s darkened expression.

There were Goma there, standing armed like the one’s around us. No, not them, further back, there’s something.

“T-the hell, is that...”

It was a fairly large shadow. The shadow, no, that thing had the same jet black skin as the Goma. But as if the species was completely different, it was big. Clearly taller than me, at around 2 meters. And not only tall, it’s body can be said to be muscle itself. It wore a robust armor of muscle akin to body-builders.

But those muddy yellow eyes, and that dirty, blood-smeared wide mouth on its face, forces you to see it as nothing but a Goma.

“GU, GUGe, GeGE”

It looked at me, and it laughed. And laughing, with that mouth, it was biting on something, some red meat— no, it was munching on a human arm.

“Wha!?”

“... That’s, Kousaka”

*Wh-what.* That, that torn off arm that’s become Goma feed, you’re telling me it belongs to Hiroki.

Kousaka Hiroki, he was my friend. No, you could even say a best friend. I’ve known him since 2<sup>nd</sup> year 8th grade middleschool, and he’s the guy I’ve known second longest after Ryuuichi.

I relied on him a lot. He always tried to cover for me when I ended up ditching out of habit. Of course, even in the dungeon capturing, he’ll surely help out. He’ll ally with us, I’ll depend on him, we’d be comrades... that was supposed to happen.

“No, way...”

“Sorry Souma... I wasn’t strong enough, Kousaka, I couldn’t save him”

No Asuna, you have nothing to apologize for. I mean, Hiroki, that guy loved you.

Surrounded by all these enemies, there's no way Hiroki won't help fight with you. It was supposed to be his chance. *It was your chance to show off to Asuna dammit.* Asuna had declared she wouldn't recognize any man who wasn't strong; it was supposed to be his greatest chance to get close to her.

But then, ahh, why, what the hell... what's with this tragic end... no way. There's no damn way.

"Sorry but Souma, there's no time for grief. Look, that thing there, it's strong. Kousaka was a Knight, and it cut him down in one stroke."

The Goma swallowed down Hiroki's arm whole, it looked at me again and laughed. As if its delicious prey had increased, it was amused.

So Kousaka was a Knight. I don't know what kind of skillset that came with, but it was undoubtedly one centered on fighting. And it took down that Kousaka in one shot. This guy should be immensely strong... No, its power must be from that weapon it's holding.

"Asuna, that sword is"

"A Demon Sword, you could say. And that blade, its surrounded in that red fuzziness, I don't think I'm just seeing things there"

In it's right had, the Goma held a single sword. A Odachi with quite a long blade. Just as Asuna said, from those pristine waves on it's blade, an ominous crimson aura gushed forth.<sup>[3]</sup>

This one's evidently on a whole nother lever from the average Goma. Could be their Boss. Seeing as that have this many of them, but not a single one's attacking, it would seem the Boss wants to personally kill its prey.

At any rate, we needed to face this Boss Goma, along with its large number of remaining Goma troops.

"Souma, I'm glad you guys came but... It's still gonna be a tough fight. You ready?"

*Ready*, she says. You know that question's pretty dumb, don't you Asuna. At

this stage, there's no point asking.

Cause they— they killed my friend. No way I'll forgive them.

“We're going Asuna. We'll avenge Hiroki—”

Removed from fear and doubt, I face the Boss Goma blocking the way, and went for the kill.

[1] Change: transfer gate → divine gate, I think it's slightly better? Again, 天送門 is the raw.

[2] It's kinda unimportant but Kotori-tan... her name looks like this 小鳥遊 小鳥, the characters repeat so I guess that's interesting. 剣崎明日那 Kenzaki Asuna... has 剣 — ken — sword in her name.

[3] A pic to compare different swords. look for the Odachi.

# Author's Q&A: Act.3

Now then, for some commentary on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Act.

First, from the act title drug, there has been quite a bit of expectation. But that is fine in and of itself. There's no rule saying an author has to always go beyond the readers' expectations. It's important to have a story that goes according to expectations sometimes, I believe.

Nevertheless, though it may be expected, in the comments, the moment Futaba-chan arrived, the keyword berserker has been flowing around quite a bit. C'mon, you did the Nightmare Berserker thing in Kuro no Maou so doing it again was, completely necessary! Well of course it is, cause I love stuff like that! [1]

Well, if I may give my best excuse, in Kuro no Maou, the berserker is the protagonist, while in Shaman, it's the heroine; see, completely different!

I'll take this opportunity to say it, when Futaba-chan got her berserker vocation, that was the exact moment when she became the heroine. The last part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> act on the Kotarou side, being 'Shaman and Pig', and the 3<sup>rd</sup> having 'Shaman and Berserker' was meant to give that contrast. I've said this on the last one and I'll say it again, a heroine who can't fight is simply a sow...

With that, please give your regards to our berserker-class heroine Futaba-chan!

The composition of this 3<sup>rd</sup> act goes like, Crisis → Awakening → Victory! that kind of cliché thing. Was it the hero who awakened, or the heroine, or maybe they awakened to the many sensations, there's a few twists here and there, but the story flow was pretty much the tried-and-tested, cliché one.

I must admit that there's a lot of fun to find in perpetuating these clichés, but having an easy awakened victory makes me sick, though there's the feeling it's become the norm. So there, taking the awakened victory as the conclusion, how far to the edge can I go with this, making it fit this story even more; I tried to pursue that and this was result.

Only because Futaba awakened as a Berserker did I write her as so useless in the first half of the act. Again, on Kotarou's crisis preceding the victory, he was beaten down in mind and body, and I wanted to draw out that shameful display. Kotarou's pitifulness in being so one-sidedly harassed by Goma isn't something I can write for Kurono. I can write it because he's weak. It's almost writing itself.

If I may digress, showing the protagonist's shameful display, is quite difficult to write I believe. Especially in scenarios like the one in Shaman, in stories where the class is summoned, where the bullied kid gets a cheat power and goes on all out revenge, in that kind of story, there isn't any specific scene detailing the all important past bullying, that is, at least to my reading experience. In many cases, the bullied kid is picked on by someone only putting on the airs of a typical DQNpunk, making fun of his weak-looking (but actually a cheat) power, maybe tricking him some, landing him in a few traps, dropping him into a hole in the dungeon, only that level of harassment. The protag will only feel weakness, but never any boiling hatred for the actions done against him.

As for why this factor of misery is cleanly extracted from the bullied kid... it's because he doesn't need it.

Even these bullied kids are protagonists in the end. It's been already promised that the mean DQN bully will be avenged upon, sometimes exhilaratingly, sometimes cruelly, with the cheat powers. What's needed is only the promised triumph, the descriptions of pain and suffering aren't required. And say they did that, the norm right now is that it'd simply backfire, and result in tons of hate mail will come flooding in.

And naturally, there wouldn't be a problem with the protagonist himself which incited the bullying. It's all the DQN bully's fault and god would have a special place for him in hell. For proof of that, in most cases, it'd turn out that the prettiest girl in class is actually in love with the bullied kid, or maybe he's on her mind at least.

Now, after attaining that convenient power, is it right as a person to use it for revenge? Cheat abilities are tremendous, but the protagonist who uses those powers, is he really strong? If he got his hands on such overwhelming power,



he'd take his revenge, but while still weak, he'd keep to himself. Internally deeming it impossible, is that attitude truly commendable cool as a man?

In the protagonist of a story, I try to find parts of him I can respect. *I couldn't do something like this, I couldn't think that up, couldn't endure that much, couldn't work as hard...* anything. Instead of a long wow MC so epic explanation, I'd much rather try and feel those traits from him from the heart, and I'm convinced that it'd make for a great story.

Anyway, that's that kind of story. That kind of protagonist isn't bad per se. And in reality, it's because it isn't bad that it's popular. The rest is a problem of personal opinion.

So, since it's a problem of preference, I'd say it's not to mine, I'm sick of it, no thanks... is my general stance.

It's because I have these dissatisfactions that Kotarou needs to suffer. Kotarou is weak, but he's someone who can stay weak and still appeal as a protagonist. I see Kotarou being beaten up by Goma as something where he shines brightest.

And that is why, this many painful experiences are necessary to seek value from an awakened victory, and the full emotion conveyed from their new-found strength would be all the more grand.

Having raised the heroine from Pig to Berserker, Kotarou can finally try to truly tackle dungeon capture. So please look forward to what these two who've started from the very bottom, will do from now.

So it's now time for the Q&A part

Q. So you can change a vocation?<sup>[2]</sup>

A. Of course.

The vocation granted by God is strictly one that suits the person at the point in time it is given, and with new experiences and growth, new possibilities can open up, and the vocation can respond to that and give the user some choices.

Q. About cursed weapons...

A. Curse weapons are, a thing!

They exist, and that being said, whether they can be found is another question.

Q. The hero and knight seems to have a goddess, a hint?

A. They're different people. Different goddesses.

There's plain old gods, and even one's made of bone with indecipherable gender like Ruinhilde, and many more sorts; It's pretty similar to the polytheistic divine protection system of the Black Gods.

Q. About drugs, wasn't a warning note necessary?

A. After some deliberation, I decided not.

Personally, I think this kind of thing shouldn't be a must. Sometimes, the plot is completely messed up with warnings, I occasionally feel.

Of course, now that it's there, there's no helping it but...

Just in case, I'll say this: the narcotic that appeared in the story is not a narcotic, but a magical drug that is very similar. It doesn't exist in real life, it is a fantasy medication, and even using these stimulants, there won't be any cheat powers. It is a crime to use illegal drugs. Say no to drugs kids.

Q. So Futaba, how's she look anyway?

A. Please look up Super Pochaco. Futaba should currently look something like that. Though, the individual herself is self-conscious about her figure.<sup>[3]</sup>

Recently, she's been trying out this shady diet pill by the name of power seed, that a boy from class has been recommending her.

Q. Is Kotarou-chan being delicious, cannibalism?

A. It's simply a bit of irrepressible sexual desire, not really any cannibalistic tendencies involved. Aren't there people who sometimes bite when in that state?

But the real secret to Kotarou being delicious is...

Q. Is Kotarou a chubby chaser?<sup>[4]</sup>

A. The bigger the tits the better (breast lifts are a NO) and pursuing that

thought process he enthusiastically dove into the sea of electrons every night, collecting important bits of intel, finally coming to expand his strikezone, which happened to happen right about the time he rose to his 2<sup>nd</sup> year11th grade

He's at the level where he can turn a blind eye to the fat if the chest is large enough, so he's not a genuine chubby chaser. Frankly, he's just into huge breasts.

Well, I guess indulging in the protagonist's inclinations too much would leave much to be desired from the story...

Q. Kotarou: “Do it, Baazaaka!”

A. Futaba: “■■■■■ ! [5]

[1] So in Shaman, they haven't actually spelled out the word 'berserker' in English yet, it's pure translation. But in KnM they do.

[2] *Sigh...* so there's a pun, 天職 (vocation) 転職(change), both said tenshoku, so yeah.

[4] Hey... an actual question some of you guys asked~